

# **A STUDY OF THE SERMON INTRODUCTION IN CONTEMPORARY PREACHING**

**BY**

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## **Declaration**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis aims to underline the importance of the sermon introduction. Every sermon generally divides itself into three parts: the introduction, the body and the conclusion. Then, what is the purpose of the sermon introduction? My research focuses on the sermon introduction in terms of the following two questions: Firstly, what is the precise purpose of the sermon introduction in the dynamics between gaining the attention and not losing the attention? Secondly, what is the influence of the sermon introduction: how can the sermon introduction affect the preacher and the hearer?

Chapter 2 explores the identity of the sermon introduction relating to four key aspects: Firstly, the fact that the sermon introduction is the first part of the sermon and is related to the body but has its own integrity. Secondly, the fact that the preacher should investigate the skill of rhetoric because one of the purposes of preaching, like that of rhetoric, is also persuasion. Thirdly, the notion that the “uselessness” of the sermon introduction could detach the thoughts of the hearers from the Word of God. Finally, the logical fact that the sermon introduction seems very natural and that it is fitting that a sermon should have an introduction.

In Chapter 3 we firstly examine the importance of the sermon introduction relating to the preacher and the hearers. The sermon introduction affects the preacher in proclaiming the Word effectively and the hearers to receive the

Word well. And, secondly, we investigate the purposes of the sermon introduction concentrating on the following three aspects: to gain attention; not to lose attention; to introduce the theme.

In Chapter 4 we firstly investigate the sources of the sermon introduction. The preacher can utilize the text and context in view of the sermon introduction. We secondly examine the qualities of the sermon introduction, concentrating on the two aspects: positive qualities and negative qualities.

In Chapter 5 we emphasize four key aspects of images relating to the sermon introduction: God images, Text images, preacher images and congregational images, all discussed in the light of examples of sermon introductions.

In Chapter 6 we make suggestions concerning the following four aspects: Firstly, the length of the sermon introduction. Secondly, time to prepare the sermon introduction. Thirdly, the importance of eye-contact with the hearers. Lastly, constructing some “check-lists” for the sermon introduction.

## **OPSOMMING**

Hierdie tesis ondersoek die belang van die preekinleiding. Alle preke bestaan normaalweg uit drie dele: die inleiding, liggaam (hoofgedeelte) en slot. Wat is die betekenis en doel van die inleiding? Ek fokus in hierdie studie veral op twee vrae: Eerstens: Wat is die presiese bedoeling van die preekinleiding in die dinamika tussen aandag-verkryging en aandag-verlies? Tweedens: Wat is die effek van die preekinleiding - hoe kan dit die prediker en hoorder beïnvloed?

Hoofstuk 2 ondersoek die karakter/ identiteit van die preekinleiding in terme van vier kernaspekte: 1. Die outonomie van en integrasie van die preekinleiding by die res van die preek. 2. Die belang van retoriek vir die preekinleiding. 3. Sommige besware teen die preekinleiding. 4. Die logiese funksie van die preekinleiding.

In hoofstuk 3 let ons op die belang van die preekinleiding in terme van die volgende aspekte: 1. Die relasie tot die prediker en hoorders, en 2. Die doel van die preekinleiding ten opsigte van aandag-verkryging en aandag-verlies, en as inleiding tot die tema van die preek.

In hoofstuk 4 kyk ons na die bronne vir die preekinleiding, veral in terme van die teks en konteks. Ons let verder op positiewe en negatiewe moontlikhede van die preekinleiding.

In hoofstuk 5 kom vier beelde aan die orde, soos dit blyk uit die analise van 'n aantal preekinleidings, naamlik Godsbeelde, teksbeelde, prediker-beelde en gemeente-beelde.

In hoofstuk 6 word suggesties gemaak ten opsigte van die lengte van die preekinleiding, die tyd benodig vir voorbereiding, die belang van oog-kontak, en 'n tipe verwysingshulp met betrekking tot die preekinleiding.

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I hope that this thesis will serve as a small contribution in proclaiming the gospel of Christ to the glory of God.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY**

When I was 22 years old I became a part time minister while still a student at Pusan Theological College in Korea. Frankly speaking, for me the preaching ministry was difficult. Later, at the age of 30, I became an ordained minister. Preaching still is not easy for me. I have contemplated on how to be a good preacher as I realized that I could not capture the attention of the hearer. I had not given much effort to the introduction of a sermon; my sermon's focus was on its body and conclusion. But, the sermon's introduction is the crucial part of the whole sermon. I then recognized that the sermon's introduction leads to the rest of the sermon.

As a homiletical student, I thought about the importance of the sermon's introduction and considered it to be a decisive part in the construction of the sermon. Therefore, the subject of this thesis is the introduction to a sermon. There are several reasons for the selection of this topic for my thesis.

Firstly, most preachers pay no attention to the sermon's introduction. In general, they focus on the sermon's body and conclusion. Secondly, they do not recognize the necessity for an introduction to a sermon. Thirdly, if the sermon's introduction is good, the rest of the sermon can lead well.

In general, there are three parts to a sermon. According to Cox (1976:61-62), "Sermons need introduction, body, and conclusion." Many preachers wish to give a sermon a wonderful body and want to compose an impressive conclusion to the sermon in order to transform their congregations. Therefore, they easily focus on the sermon's body and conclusion and, in so doing, ignore the significance of the introduction. But, the first few minutes of the introduction to the sermon possibly are the only time that all the hearers present will absorb the preacher's preaching.

Therefore, the sermon's structure and order enhances the preacher's preaching and improves his/her hearers' listening. This proposed study will focus on the sermon's introduction, noting its importance and significance to the whole sermon.

## **1.2 THE MAIN PROBLEM**

When I started to investigate a sermon's introduction, one question was naturally raised: the contemporary critique on preaching. Many scholars mention preaching in crisis. According to Cilliers (2004:6-17), there are four kinds of contemporary critique. Firstly, critique from social sciences: the church no longer represents each town or city's heart, no longer is respected as an authoritative voice in parliament, or the fountain of all truth under the sun. Preaching no longer is accepted as obvious. Secondly, critique from communication sciences: the culture of the image is replacing the culture of books. In fact, some state that we have entered an era in which the art of

reading may become an anachronism. Thirdly, critique from theological sciences: many people basically ask whether the sermon really still is appropriate. Lastly, critique from the church pews: large numbers of congregants suffer in silence or declare that preaching is, or has become, boring, irrelevant and disappointing and many church members vote with their feet by leaving the church.

According to Runia (1983:1-17), various points of criticism exist; firstly, the critique of social scientists. Within society, there has been a tremendous shift in the position of the church, which was in the centre of society until the industrial revolution. However, in the meantime, the church itself has largely become a typical middle-class institution, the impact of which upon society as a whole has become minimal.

Secondly, similar criticisms come from the side of the modern communication experts. Naturally, they too are interested in the sermon, because it is still one of the most common means of communication. Their evaluation and assessment, however, is largely negative.

Thirdly, there is a third group of people who voice severe criticism of the sermon. Perhaps they are the most unlikely members of the critical choir, for they are theologians.

Lastly, the main category has not been mentioned, that is men and women in the pew. What do they think about sermons? Their main complaint is that many

sermons are so terribly boring. They can make their disappointment and dissatisfaction heard in only one way: by staying away!

As Horne (1975:11-22) points out, there is a crucial crisis in the pulpit and it may well be the most serious pulpit crisis in the whole history of the church. This is a sobering fact, and foolish is the preacher who does not regard the present crisis in preaching as serious.

The modern preacher must face the fact that there is a crisis in preaching, but this is not the first crisis that the pulpit has faced. However, the present crisis may be the most serious that preaching has had to face in the whole history of the church. The crisis of the pulpit has been produced by four converging crises: faith, the institutional church, authority, and communication.

The *crisis of faith* is that preaching takes place within the context of faith. It declares God's saving action, especially through Jesus Christ, to which people respond with faith and trust. A crisis of faith produces a crisis in the pulpit. Now, we face such a crisis. The "loss of God" has cast a shadow of doubt over other tenets of faith, as traditionally understood. Jesus Christ is often reduced to an ethical image. This is the most fundamental of the four crises with which we are concerned.

The *crisis of the church* is that, since preaching is one of the basic functions of the church, the pulpit suffers proportionately in the crisis. Where there is a loss of faith in the church's integrity, as in our day, there is a loss of faith in the

integrity of preaching. The pulpit suffers from a credibility gap.

The *crisis of authority* is that obvious rebellion against authority exists in all our institutions - one of the marks of our times. Since the church is not being spared, neither can the pulpit be spared. But, the pulpit is particularly sensitive to rebellion against authority.

The *crisis of communication* is that a communication gap often exists between the pulpit and the pew. The pulpit is especially sensitive to the communication crisis, since preaching is a basic form of communication within the church.

Bluck (1989:1) comments, "Theologically, communication begins and ends with that dimension of dialogue. The opposite of communication is not silence but sinfulness. Communication, as a theological word, becomes an issue of the right relationship with God and each other, presupposing dignity, equality and freedom."

As Stott (1982:50-91) also points this out, I want to examine the three main arguments that are being advanced against preaching – the anti-authority mood, the cybernetics revolution and the loss of confidence in the Gospel. The anti-authority mood began at least with the Enlightenment in the 18th century and grew more vocal in the 19th.... Thus, minds cannot be organized and thoughts cannot be forced on people. There is no such thing as an absolute truth and therefore being universal. On the contrary, everything is relative and subjective. The cybernetics revolution refers to radical changes in

communication as a result of the development of complex electronic equipment. The contemporary loss of confidence in the Gospel is the most basic of all hindrances to preaching. Without a clear and confident message, preaching is impossible. Yet, this is precisely what the church seems to lack nowadays.

Mitchell (2005:156) comments, "Television has also contributed toward a change in how we expect to be spoken to in the public sphere. The language of television is markedly different from the language of the Victorian pulpit. It has also influenced expectations about the length, style and content of public discourse."

However, the preacher should react to the mood of preaching in crises. He/she allows the audience to listen to the Word of God. In order to do that, the preacher should consider the importance of the sermon's introduction because it is the starting point of the whole sermon.

Every sermon is divided into three parts: the introduction, the body and the conclusion. Then, what is the purpose of the sermon's introduction? I believe that its purpose is to gain the hearers' attention. But, according to Nichols (1980:102-103):

We have all heard that the purpose of an introduction is to get people's attention. The rather painful fact is that we already have their attention and their willingness as a free gift. What we have is their offer to participate in the preaching that is about to happen. We do not need to get it, but we surely do need to use



it by establishing a contract for communication.

Sangster (1949:111) also states, "Most of our hearers give us their attention at the start." My starting point, *inter alia*, is to discover which of the following two, gaining the attention or not losing the attention, is the most accurate purpose of the sermon's introduction.

My research will focus on a sermon's introduction in terms of the following two areas:

1.2.1 What is the precise purpose of the sermon's introduction, between gaining the attention and not losing the attention?

1.2.2 What is the influence of a sermon's introduction: how can this introduction affect the preacher as well as the hearer? I shall investigate the influence of a sermon's introduction on both the preacher and the hearers.

### **1.3 THE AIM OF THE RESEARCH**

The aim of the suggested research is to contribute to a better understanding of a sermon's introduction (Hostetler 1986:12), to disclose the necessity of a sermon's introduction and to demonstrate its influence. In order to succeed in this, the following objectives must be attained.

1.3.1 I shall demonstrate that the sermon's introduction is necessary. In this

thesis, the problem that I wish to investigate is that of this introduction not losing the hearers' attention. Most preachers do not pay attention to the first few minutes of the sermon. They are eager to proclaim the message of the Bible itself, then simply jump immediately to the message. They do not consider the hearers' situation.

1.3.2 I shall establish how an introduction to a sermon affects the preacher. Sweazey (1976:94) states, "The opening makes the first impression. It can give the preacher a flying start or a handicap. His opening sentences may set listeners for him or against him." Broadus (1944:101) advises: "Moreover, the preacher himself needs, for the sake of self-possession, certitude, and deliberate movement, to walk or step into his message rather than to plunge headlong to it."

I shall provide evidence that the sermon's introduction affects the hearers. Introductions and conclusions have significance in a sermon out of proportion to their length (Robinson 1980:159). Jones (1958:154) states, "The two parts of the sermon most easily ruined are the Introduction and the Conclusion. Without doubt they are consistently the weakest parts of the average sermon."

1.3.3 If a preacher fails to gain his/her audience's attention with a captivating introduction, he/she has probably lost them for the rest of the message (Mayhue 1992:243). According to Robinson (1980:159), an audience gains impressions of a speaker during the introduction that often determines whether or not they will accept what he/she says. Demaray (1978:67) argues, "Why is

the introduction so important? Simply this: in the first two minutes you have your congregation or you don't." Sangster (1949:111) also comments, "If one does not take a firm grip of their attention in the first few minutes, how can one hope to hold it to the end?" It is very clear, a preacher must consider the importance of the introduction to the sermon.

#### **1.4 THE HYPOTHESIS**

My hypothesis is, firstly, that the sermon's introduction has the decisive role of determining whether or not the hearers consciously decide to listen to the rest of the sermon. And secondly, the quality of the introduction will affect the preacher's ability to proclaim the rest of the sermon to good effect. I shall clarify this hypothesis in detail.

1.4.1 The sermon's introduction influences the listener's ability to receive the rest of the sermon effectively and well.

Why is the sermon's introduction so significant? The answer is very simple; in the first few minutes you have your congregation or you don't. According to Stott (1982:244), "A good introduction serves two purposes. First it arouses interest, stimulates curiosity, and whets the appetite for more. Secondly, it genuinely 'introduces' the theme by leading the hearers into it." Jones (1958:155) recommends, "The introduction should be designed to allure them to the preacher and to his subject." According to Gibbs (1960:192), "The introduction has been well called the crucial five minutes. In this period, the

speaker will either gain or lose his audience.” Ford (1979:215) also comments, “If the preacher does not capture and hold the attention in the first two minutes, he is unlikely to recapture it.”

1.4.2 The sermon’s introduction influences a preacher’s ability to proclaim the rest of the sermon effectively. According to Killinger (1985:79), “People are heard to complain when they have failed, ‘If only I could start over, I think I could do much better’. The beginning of the sermon is no exception.” Gibbs (1960:193) states, “Well begun is half done, is good counsel. Therefore the great necessity for the most prayerful and careful preparation is the introduction.” Killinger (1985:80) also says, “Even the preacher’s mood is affected by the introduction. If the opening remarks are effective, the preacher feels confident and relaxed; he or she shifts into second gear and moves easily into the body of the sermon.”

## **1.5 METHOD OF RESEARCH**

The method to be used in the investigation of this study is twofold: analysis of the sermon’s introduction and concentrated synthetic description. The framework for my practical theological methodology can be acquired from Dingemans’ (1996:92-3) practical theological methodology. He provides a valuable research methodology for practical theology that consists of four phases: the descriptive; explanatory; normative; and strategic phases.

The first *descriptive phase* consists of identifying the praxis itself, or the

situation. Dingemans (1996:92) advises, “The first step should be the analysis of practice itself.” During this phase, I shall analyze specifically the introduction of a number of sermons, pointing out the varying qualities of these introductions. Here, I shall make use of the Heidelberg method of sermon analysis (Cilliers 2006:11). This method seeks to reveal the explicit and implicit signs of language in sermons. It meticulously notes finer speech signals, for example: the introductory sentences, because they mostly determine the course of the sermon.

The second *explanatory step* is to seek a critical explanation of the practical situation. This will lead to new theories or new options (Dingemans 1996:92).

The third *normative phase* aims to examine the praxis itself to find tradition’s normative backgrounds, or to examine people’s normative ideas (Dingemans 1996:92).

The last *strategic phase* aims to make suggestions and recommendations in order to improve and transform the existing practice (Dingemans 1996:92).

With this practical theological methodology in mind, I shall plan my homiletical study of the sermon’s introduction in such a way as to engage the above mentioned four phases of study.

To reach my goal, I shall firstly compare and synthesize the theory of the sermon’s introduction by means of a literature study. Throughout this study, the

basic process of the work will entail comparison, analysis, evaluation and combination.

In the second explanatory phase, I shall seek a critical explanation of the sermon's introduction. At this stage, books on homiletics and rhetoric will be investigated concerning the sermon's introduction, while enquiring about the skill of rhetoric to persuade the hearer.

It has been said that rhetoric is the art or discipline that deals with the use of discourse, either spoken or written, to inform, persuade or motivate an audience, whether that audience comprises one person or a group of persons (Corbett 1990:3). As Lawrie (2005:3) points out, in some societies people have studied the techniques of using language effectively and have trained others in these techniques. This is how the art of rhetoric was born.

Moreover, preachers should draw upon all the resources that can perfect the skills that they employ for the proclamation of the Word of God. These resources lie in the living rhetorical tradition. In some sense, preaching involves rhetoric. According to Koster (1986:305), Aristotle took speech seriously enough to compose an enduring treatise on rhetoric, and is called *Rhetoric*.

I shall discuss rhetoric later (in 2.2), in detail, related to the sermon's introduction. The normative and strategic phases are to follow, so as to make suggestions pertinent to direction in order to improve the current theory of the

introduction to a sermon.

## **1.6 THE DELIMITATION**

The delimitation of the study is made in regard to the following two concerns: the construction of the sermon and analysis of the sermon's introduction.

Firstly, as regards the construction of the sermon: the sermon's introduction is the first part of the whole sermon's construction, on which I shall focus as a whole, but specifically on the first part of the construction, the introduction, which plays a key role in determining the result of the sermon.

The second delimitation needs to be made in connection with the sphere of our study of the analysis of the sermon's introduction. In this study, the main focus is on the effect of the sermon's introduction on both the preacher and the hearer.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **IDENTITY OF THE INTRODUCTION TO A SERMON**

This chapter will establish the identity of the sermon's introduction. To do this, I shall first investigate the definition of a sermon's introduction. After that, I shall also examine the relevance between rhetoric and a sermon's introduction. Then, I shall discuss Barth's theory of the uselessness of the sermon's introduction. Finally, I shall thoroughly investigate the theory of the necessity of an introduction to a sermon.

#### **2.1 DEFINITION OF A SERMON'S INTRODUCTION**

This section examines the definition of a sermon's introduction. To do that, I shall firstly briefly define "introduction," and secondly, I shall investigate the definition of a sermon's introduction.

##### **2.1.1 Definition of "introduction"**

When I discuss the characteristics of a sermon's introduction, one of the important points of departure for this discussion will be the definition of "introduction." By definition, "to introduce" means to acquaint or to bring into play for the first time. The old writers on rhetoric and homiletics used to call "introduction" an "exordium." Cannon (2003:101) states, "Literally, *intro* means 'into' or 'inside'; and *duct* means a 'pipe' or 'lead' or 'entrance'." This implies that an introduction is like a pipe or entrance to guide or take something somewhere.



### **2.1.2 Definition of a sermon's introduction**

Sermonic introduction is defined as the preliminary discussion by which the hearers are led meaningfully into the heart of the discourse. Cannon (2003:100) observes, "All parts of this definition suggest that the introduction is not an essential part of preaching *per se*, though it is an important part; since it is not really the Word of God, but is merely the spiritual ailment."

It has been said that an introduction to a sermon is like a departure from a harbour on an ocean voyage. In other words, the introduction to a sermon may be likened to the prelude to a poem, the preface to a book, the portico to a building, or the preamble to a statement in a court case. Baumann (1972:138) also defines it as follows: "A sermon is like a golf game. The introduction is comparable to the tee shot, the body of the sermon to the fairway game, and the conclusion to the putting game." Many scholars compare the sermon's introduction as a porch to a house (Chung 1999:204; Knecht 1986:285; Smith 1984:43; Baumann 1972:138; Evans 1964:64; Gibbs 1960:189). Perry (1965:76) comments, "The introduction is that part of the sermon which clarifies the reason why this audience should listen to this preacher discuss this subject on the occasion." According to Packer (1990:186), a sermon is an applicatory declaration, spoken in God's name and for His praise, in which, through the preacher, some part of the written Word of God delivers some part of its message about God and godliness in relation to those whom the preacher addresses.

Therefore, an introduction serves to a sermon as a porch does to a house; or a prelude to a symphony; or the dawn to the actual rising of the sun above the horizon; or the approach of a bridge to the actual structure itself; or the bud to a rose.

In summary, on the basis of various definitions of the sermon's introduction, the introduction is not the first point of the sermon's body; it is separate from the body of the sermon. It is related to the body, but has its own integrity based on the distinct functions that it is to perform (Hoefer 1982:46). The sermon's introduction is part of the sermon that leads up to the discussion and thus prepares the audience for the main part of the sermon - the discussion.

## **2.2 RHETORIC AND THE SERMON'S INTRODUCTION**

This section investigates the relevance between rhetoric and the sermon's introduction. To attain that, I shall firstly briefly examine the definition of rhetoric. Secondly, I shall demonstrate the tendency of rhetoric from the negative to the positive. Thirdly, I shall study the relevance between rhetoric and the sermon's introduction. Lastly, I shall observe rhetorical influences on the introduction to the sermon.

### **2.2.1 Definition of rhetoric**

When starting an examination of the relevance between rhetoric and the

sermon's introduction, one question should be discussed, i.e. what is rhetoric? Rhetoric is the purposeful use of verbal language in relation to a particular audience. In its classical sense, rhetoric is the art of persuasion. Corbett (1990:20) says, "Our English noun *rhetoric* derives from the Greek feminine adjective *rhetorike*, which is elliptical for *rhetorike techne* (the art of the rhetor or orator). English derived its word directly from the French *rhetorique*." Eslinger (1996:1) declares: "Rhetoric is the study of oral communication in a communal context." According to Robbins (1996:1), The term 'rhetorical' refers to the way language in a text is a means of communication among people.

Corbett (1990:23) relates, "Aristotle spoke of included artistic proof – 'artistic' in the sense that they fell within the province of the art of rhetoric: rational appeal (*logos*), emotional appeal (*pathos*), and ethical appeal (*ethos*)." According to Odiam (1989:35-39), *ethos*, the first of the three artificial proofs, refers to the speaker's personal character as determined by the speech itself.... *Pathos*, the second of the three artificial proofs, occurs when the hearer's state of mind is moved by the emotion of the speech itself.... *Logos*, the last of the three artificial proofs, is by no means the least in significance. On the contrary, *logos* is the kind of *pistis* found in every reasoned argument.

Moreover, the element of *ethos*, the preachers' perceived credibility in the mind of their audience, can be markedly influenced by the kind and quality of their introductions. The preachers' *ethos* is so important that they make it part of the central feature of their homiletic. *Ethos* is more than our personal ethics: It is about the preachers' personality and the character of their relationship with the

hearers.

According to Corbett (1990:20), classical rhetoric was associated primarily with persuasive discourse. Its end was to convince or persuade an audience to think or to act in a certain way. Later, the principles of rhetoric were extended to apply to informative or expository modes of discourse but, in the beginning, they were applied almost exclusively to the persuasive modes of discourse.

Thus, rhetoric may be defined as a skill to persuade people in a certain way during discourse.

### **2.2.2 Rhetoric's tendency: negative to positive**

For a long time, a concept of rhetoric has been considered negatively. At best, rhetoric is perceived as only one of many influences on the development of the sermon. Shin (2004:48) comments, "The refusal to apply rhetoric to preaching is deeply rooted in the misunderstanding of the definition of rhetoric by Plato."

The importance of rhetoric is increasingly recognized within philosophy, literary criticism, and the Bible itself (Wilson 1995:65-66). However, Augustine promoted its positive regard. Augustine (354-430) was also a teacher of rhetoric, first in Carthage and later in Milan. His work entitled, *On Christian doctrine*, was effectively the first homiletical handbook (Park 2004:84). According to Kennedy (1993:23), Augustine stands in a dialectical relation to the rhetorical tradition of which he was part.... After his conversion to

Christianity, Augustine sought to reconcile rhetoric and homiletics.

Kennedy (1993:24) also pronounces, “Thus, Augustine argues that rhetoric is not secular paganism but a legitimate means by which the Gospel could be preached. In short, Augustine re-established Ciceronian rhetorical concepts, and should be viewed as the last of the classical rhetoricians.”

According to Oberhelman (1991:116), Augustine argues that eloquence cannot be separated from Christian truth.... Eloquence without truth is empty, false rhetoric. In other words, the notion of rhetoric changes from negative to positive. Therefore, the notion of rhetoric being gradually changed is owing to Augustine.

### **2.2.3 Relevance of rhetoric to the sermon’s introduction**

As briefly mentioned above (1.2.2), the concept of rhetoric has recently changed positively. In this phase, this section will examine the relevance of rhetoric to the sermon’s introduction.

According to Corbett (1990:22), by the time Cicero wrote his treatises on rhetoric, the study of rhetoric was divided - mainly for pedagogical convenience - into five parts: *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria*, and *pronuntiatio*.... *Inventio* is the Latin term for ‘invention’ or ‘discovery.’

Corbett (1990:25) declares,

The second part of rhetoric was disposition, which may be translated as 'disposition,' 'arrangement,' 'organization.' This was the division of rhetoric concerned with the effective and orderly arrangement of the parts of a written or spoken discourse. Latin rhetoricians further refined these divisions, recognizing six parts: the introduction; the statement or exposition of the case under discussion; the outline of the points or steps in the argument; the proof of the case; the refutation of the opposing arguments; and the conclusion.

Stated differently, introduction is the first sect within the second part, disposition, of pedagogical convenience of rhetoric.

Furthermore, many scholars indicate the relevance between rhetoric and the sermon's introduction. Odiam (1989:58) pronounces, "New Testament texts may be interpreted hermeneutically and proclaimed homiletically, using universal rhetorical principles." Kennedy (1993:13) also comments, "Rhetoricians have devoted extensive studies to preaching; studies which have contributed to a better understanding of the rhetorical nature of preaching."

As Corbett (1990:21) points out, although classical rhetoric has largely disappeared from our schools, there was a time when it was very much alive. For extended periods during its 2000-year history, the study of rhetoric was the central discipline in the curriculum. Rhetoric enjoyed this eminence because, during those periods, skill in oratory or in written discourse was the key to preferment in the courts, the forum, and the church.

Therefore, we can draw the relevance of rhetoric to the sermon's introduction. Older homiletic texts seemed to suppose that the very first sentence of a

sermon was crucial, a “grabber” that by sheer rhetorical force could instantly command an audience’s attention (Buttrick 1987:86).

#### **2.2.4 Influences of rhetoric on a sermon’s introduction**

As briefly discussed above (2.2.3), rhetoric has immense relevance to a sermon’s introduction. In this section, I shall shortly examine rhetorical influences on the sermon’s introduction.

While preaching is unique, not least by being God’s Word, it is closely related to rhetoric as conversation or dialogue, the aim of which is persuasion or identification that seeks to enroll people into a way of life. An abundance of rhetorical strategies exists for preaching. The sermon is intended to accomplish a specific purpose and its introduction is a means to help the sermon to accomplish that purpose. To do that, it must enlist the hearers’ attention and goodwill. Through rhetoric, the preacher can obtain the skill of obtaining the hearers’ goodwill.

The best preaching has always involved art, a high level of planning and control in the sharing of the truth. Kroll (1980:159) comments, “Aristotle enumerates four parts to oration. Those parts are: the introduction, the proposition, the proof, and the conclusion.” According to Wood (1965:20), Dr. Campbell Morgan defines the essential ingredients of all true preaching as “truth, clarity, and passion.” To these we would add two further elements: “persuasiveness” and “colour.”

Demaray (1978:67) pronounces, “Perhaps no rhetorician has improved on Cicero’s three answers: (1) to arouse interest, (2) to secure favor, and (3) to prepare to lead.” Wardlaw (1989:88) also states:

Rhetoric, speech, and communication cover most of the expressive side of our preaching courses. They include deciding what to say about the subject, figuring out how to organize it, discovering how to phrase it effectively, making the preparation necessary for effective delivery, and knowing how to make that delivery.

As Wood points out (1965:24), speaking generally, there seems to be two basic requirements for persuasive preaching: the ability to think in a straight line, and a genuine desire to benefit the hearer in some positive way.

Achtemeier (1980:76) defines: “A sermon is an oral interpretation of God’s Word to his gathered people.” According to Shin (2004:47), a man of effective preaching should be a man of effective communication that appeals to the audience’s whole person. Effective sermons can be delivered when preachers realize the relationship between preaching and communication. As we have seen, rhetoric has an effect on the sermon’s introduction.

#### **2.2.5 Rhetorical influences on the preacher**

As briefly discussed above (2.2.4), rhetoric has a great influence on the sermon’s introduction. In this section, I shall briefly investigate the influences of rhetoric on the preacher. Today, homiletical education sometimes is narrowly focused on teaching singular methods (of biblical interpretation and homiletical



procedure). However, the preacher must master the art of getting away to a good start. Shin (2004:50) suggests, “Although classical rhetoric is not essential for effective preaching, today’s preacher needs to spend more time with the ancient teachers to understand and utilize something of classical rhetoric and persuasion.”

As Wilson points out (1995:79), Meyers’s basic advice is important: Do not preach a sermon that does not first persuade you. Since persuasion depends in part upon us, our preaching should appeal on all three levels of *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*. Wood (1965:23-24) states, “It is sometimes argued that our only task as preachers is to proclaim the good news and to leave the results entirely with God.... There are two words used in the New Testament to emphasize the fact that we are to persuade men, as well as to proclaim the good news.” Alan (1981:143) also comments, “The preacher should also be faithful in his/her actions, so that what he does he may do with a right intention, and that he may set God as the end of his deeds.”

According to Resner (1999:45), those who start with *ethos* often begin from the hearer’s standpoint and from the nature of the rhetorical situation. Rhetorically oriented homiletics is predominately hearer-driven. Those who begin with the preacher often begin with the message that he or she conveys in the theological conviction that God has prompted and empowered the preaching event. In the main, theologically oriented homiletics is message-driven. As a result, rhetoric also exercises an influence on the preacher.

The conclusion that may be drawn from this section is that the notion of rhetoric has been changing recently and the preachers' usage of rhetoric is gradually growing. Furthermore, rhetoric has a great influence on the sermon's introduction. In a sense, preaching is rhetoric. Speech is an essential part of the church's communication of the Word. This modest claim opens the door to a homiletics based on rhetorical principles. Now, the way is clear to utilize rhetoric and metaphor as the bridge in a positive interface of rhetoric and preaching.

Shin (2004:49) states, "One of the goals of preaching, like that of rhetoric, is also persuasion. Biblical teaching supports preaching as persuasion." According to Wilson (1995:63), how we do homiletical theology is altered if preaching is conceived as God's event. Theology is firstly conceived as relational, and returns to the rhetorical roots of preaching in conversation that is aimed at persuasion. Secondly, persuasion results not just from reason (*logos*), but also from character (*ethos*) and emotions (*pathos*) - elements that have been present, though largely ignored, in theology through the ages.

### **2.3 USELESSNESS OF THE SERMON'S INTRODUCTION**

This section will briefly examine the theory of "the uselessness of the sermon's introduction."

Karl Barth rather consistently proceeds to the main topic without an introduction. He (Barth 1964:110) argues,

Is an introduction necessary? Not unless it is a biblical introduction; any other kind is to be ruled out for several reasons, two of which may be noted: (1) Why do we go to church? To hear the Word of God; Thus the successive acts of worship are sufficient introduction to the sermon. A few opening will suffice; any other sort of introduction is a waste of time. (2) Only too often an introduction diverts the thoughts from the Word of God. People come the church with all kinds of preoccupations in their minds, and then the minister wastes words on what is not the real subject of his/her discourse.

Barth (1991:121-122) also comments lengthily as follows:

Certain practical or, if one will, psychological reasons may be advanced against introductions. (1) Why do we come to church? We want to hear the Word of God that comes to us in the sermon, which as explication of the text is also applicable. The course of worship itself is the introduction to the sermon, its climax. The act of proclamation should begin at once. Any additional introduction is a waste of time.... (2) The greater part of all introductions does not introduce. It distracts our thoughts from the Word of God.... At the beginning of a sermon the listeners are still in a state of suspense and attentive. (3) What meaning does an introduction have for serious listeners who want to hear a call from God and are ready for it? They will be disappointed in their purpose and their frustration will block their hearing of the message.

According to Barth (1991:121), basically, the sermon should not have an introduction. Only one kind of legitimate introduction is conceivable. When a scriptural reading precedes the sermon, a link can be made with this so that, in a sense, the sermon proper begins with a pre-sermon consisting of a brief analysis of the lesson that leads up to the real sermon. This is the only possible form of introduction. All others must be rejected in principle.

Sangster (1949:116) also states, "The idea of some preachers that all sermons

must have an introduction is nonsense. If the subject demands it, it must have it, but be glad when it is quite unnecessary and you can step swiftly in.”

In summary, the reason for Barth’s uselessness of this necessity is that the successive acts of worship are sufficient introduction to the sermon and an introduction may divert the thoughts from the Word of God when listeners are ready for His Word.

## **2.4 NECESSITY FOR THE SERMON’S INTRODUCTION**

As briefly mentioned above (2.3), a few scholars have commented on the uselessness of the sermon’s introduction. In contrast to that theory, many scholars believe in the necessity for a sermon’s introduction. This section will thoroughly examine the necessity for a sermon’s introduction in respect of both the hearers and the preacher.

### **2.4.1 Inevitability of a sermon’s introduction**

The previous section (2.3) examined the theory of the uselessness of an introduction to a sermon. However, various scholars have explained the theory of the necessity for a sermon’s introduction. It seems natural and fitting that a sermon or message should have an introduction. There are preludes to musical compositions, prefaces to books, porticos to buildings, and entrances and pathways to gardens, as well as introductions to sermons. Marty (1984:70) believes that “The idea of pre-understanding is crucial.”

An informal talk, such as a message at a prayer-meeting, may not require an introduction. However, as a general rule it is best to introduce the subject. According to Corbett (1990:25), one might say in the simplest of terms that any discourse needs a beginning, a middle, and an end; but this division of a discourse is more specific and functional.

Craddock (1971:159) strongly states, “Karl Barth’s theological objections to introduction cannot be accepted as valid in view of the modern speaker-hearer relationship.” Kroll (1980:159-160) also pronounces, “Every speech or sermon needs an introduction, body, and conclusion. These parts are sometimes referred to as the functional elements of speech.” According to Cox (1976:62), Karl Barth rather consistently moved immediately into his text, considering a formal introduction unnecessary, inasmuch as, up to the time of the sermon, the entire service serves as an introduction. However, it was Barth’s immediate discovery of the hearer in the text that made his method appealing. The text need not be striking or dramatic – if only the hearer sees that *he/she* is there, that it is about *him-/herself*.

As Kroll (1980:160) points out, it is significant that every well-written book has a preface, every *oratorio* has a prelude, and every major work has an introduction. Likewise, the day does not begin with instant light, but is given an introduction via the sunrise. Many books of the Bible also have introductions. It follows that it is not without significance that every well-written book has its preface and every *oratorio* its prelude. Abrupt beginnings must be avoided, as

they are unnatural.

#### **2.4.2 The hearers need the sermon's introduction**

In our ordinary everyday social contact with others we are accustomed to a gradual introduction before the main topic of conversation. Whether we speak over the telephone or in person, we usually spend some time identifying each other and preparing the ground for discussion of the relevant issue. Indeed, we may consider that it rude and offensive for someone to abruptly announce the topic of conversation while launching into it. This is simple common sense.

Furthermore, the sermon's introduction influences the listener's ability to receive the rest of the sermon well and effectively. The sermon's introduction establishes relevant contact with the congregation. Fasol (1989:63) points out, "Meaningful rapport with the congregation is established by telling how or why they need the sermon either as an ongoing principle in their lives or to tie in with a particular event or contemporary problem in their lives."

This section examines the necessity for the sermon's introduction to the hearers in terms of the following three reasons.

##### **2.4.2.1 *To prepare to become familiar with the Word***

First of all, the hearers need the sermon's introduction to become familiar with the Word. Preachers arrive with their sermons after hours of study and back-

ground preparation. The listeners come to the sermon cold. This implies that the preachers know what they want to say, but those who sit before them have no idea what the preachers intend to say. In their introduction, they should make sure their audiences become aware of the theme of their sermon. Adams (1982:59) says, "The preacher has been studying the passage of Scripture from which he will preach, and thinking about it, for some time; presumably, even in the midst of a series of sermons on a Bible book, the congregation has not. They come to the passage cold; that is why an introduction is in order."

The Bible is so foreign to our secularized congregation that it takes too much time to explain a text and to bridge the gap between the world of the Bible and that of the congregation (Achte-meier 1980:76). Reu (1967:486) also observes, "Hence the sermon must have an introduction, whose function it is to prepare the hearer for the subject as formulated in the theme."

According to Dabney (1979:141), If the speakers have done their duty to themselves and their subject, they have mastered it by previous study and entered the pulpit with their souls inspired and warmed with it. They cannot assume that their hearers too are in this animated state.... When the preachers are all fire and the hearers as yet are ice ... the preachers must first raise them a part of the way toward their own level.

#### **2.4.2.2 *Receiving the rest of the sermon effectively***

In addition to this (2.4.2.1), the hearers need the sermon's introduction to

receive the rest of the sermon effectively. God is a God of order. He did not create everything all at once, but progressively. The Person whom we address has a God-given sense of order. Our proclamation of the truth must conform to that or fail to find a powerful entry. Knecht (1986:276) comments, "Giving order to substance is an act of loving the hearer and loving the author of the revelation." As pointed out by Knecht (1986:278), one must think of a good structure for the most important part of the sermon to the hearers' advantage. When they sense the presence of a good structure they can rest in the pilgrimage that the minister is leading.

Balge (1978:79) states, "The need for an introduction is both rhetorical and psychological. Good rhetoric suggests that it is not appropriate to begin a sermon by announcing the theme."

According to Fisher (1979:143), in the congregation's unconscious mind, cultural weaknesses (anti-intellectualism, anti-authority, and anti-tradition attitudes) militate against hearing the Word with understanding. Because of human sin, all people resist God's truth even when they need and seek it.

#### ***2.4.2.3 Arousing interest and stimulating curiosity***

Moreover, the hearers need the sermon's introduction to arouse interest and stimulate curiosity. The congregation will want to hear the sermon if they are soon convinced that it is of some importance to them. No person is *automatically* interested in the preacher's message. One cannot even assume



that the audience or readers are automatically interested in God's message.

Evans (1964:65) declares, "An audience will not be interested simply because the speaker says, 'Now hear me,' or 'Give me your attention,' or 'Now listen.'" Therefore, the introduction to a sermon serves to awaken awareness and to motivate curiosity.

The conclusion that may be drawn from this section is that the sermon's introduction definitely influences the listener's ability to accept the rest of the sermon effectively and well. In their book, *Fundamentals of speaking*, Gilman, Aly and Reid (1951:68) argue: "The introduction enables you to gain the confidence of your hearers, to remove their prejudices, and to evoke attitudes that will get a hearing for the body of the speech."

#### **2.4.3 The preacher needs the sermon's introduction**

As briefly mentioned above (2.4.2), the hearers need the introduction to the sermon. This section will examine the necessity of the sermon's introduction in respect of the preacher. The sermon's introduction influences the preacher's ability to proclaim the rest of the sermon effectively. The introduction affects even the preacher's mood. If the opening remarks are effective, the preacher feels confident and relaxed; he or she shifts into second gear and moves easily into the body of the sermon. The theory of the introduction involves a certain relation to the mental state of the speaker.

Broadus (1944:101) pronounces, “Moreover, the preacher himself needs, for the sake of self-possession, certitude, and deliberate movement, to walk or step into his message rather than to plunge headlong into it.” According to Knecht (1986:297), the introduction assists the preachers too, for in these moments their hearts once again warm to their theme and the sentences begin to flow as they anticipate revealing the momentous ideas they have found in their study. No part of the sermon is more important than the beginning. If they begin well, the preachers will usually continue well (Hall & Heflin 1985:170).

Thus far, we have found that the preacher also needs the sermon’s introduction to proclaim effectively.

The conclusion that may be drawn from this section is that the sermon’s introduction influences both the preacher and the hearer. Of course, in an unfamiliar congregation, even our voice, our manner, our habits of thought and speech, our accent will need introduction, and the congregation may well be adjusting to these during our carefully prepared opening. If they cannot hear the introduction without strain, they may well not listen any further. By means of the introduction, the preacher should take the congregation into his/her confidence and start a conversation about the matters of God.

## **2.5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

For this reason, one can conclude that a sound structure assists not only the preachers, giving them a sense of timing, progress, and proportion, but their

audiences as well (Koller 1965:42). The aim of this chapter has been to emphasize four key aspects of the sermon's introduction: Firstly, the definition of the sermon's introduction is: it is the first part of the sermon and is related to the body, but has its own integrity.

Secondly, the relevance of rhetoric to the sermon's introduction is that preachers should examine the skill of rhetoric because one of the purposes of preaching, like that of rhetoric, is also persuasion.

Thirdly, the uselessness of the sermon's introduction is explained in that it could focus the hearers' thoughts away from the Word of God.

Finally, the need for the sermon's introduction is that it seems extremely natural and fitting that a sermon should have an introduction.

The next chapter will examine the importance and purposes of the sermon's introduction.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE IMPORTANCE AND PURPOSES OF THE INTRODUCTION TO THE SERMON**

The previous chapter investigated the identity of the introduction to the sermon, concentrating on the necessity for the sermon's introduction. This chapter proceeds to examine the importance and purposes of the sermon's introduction.

#### **3.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF A SERMON'S INTRODUCTION**

This section will investigate the importance of a sermon's introduction concentrating on two points: (1) a sermon's introduction affects the preacher and (2) affects the hearers.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the beginning of a sermon. Proverbially, "well begun is half done," thus ill begun is apt to be wholly ruined. In a sense, a good beginning for anything – a race, a novel, a concerto – is important. To start badly is to start with a handicap. The beginning of a sermon is no exception. Indeed, no one can overstate the importance of making a good start. Robinson (1980:159) indicates that, "Introduction and conclusion have significance in a sermon out of proportion to their length." Furthermore, a growing number of scholars emphasize the importance of a sermon's introduction because the first part of the sermon, the introduction, is a crucial part of the whole sermon.

The importance of a good beginning for the sermon cannot be overemphasized. The introduction is a component of extreme importance. If the introduction fails, the entire sermon is a failure. According to Long (1989:133), a great deal of ink has been spilled in the pages of homiletical literature over the matter of how to begin a sermon. If preachers appear nervous, hostile, or unprepared, their congregations are inclined to reject them. If preachers appear alert, friendly, and interesting, their audiences decide that these preachers are able persons with a positive attitude toward themselves and their listeners. An introduction is essential, and should be neither too long nor too short (Stott 1982:244).

It has been said that the congregation can usually tell how a pastor's week by his/her introduction, illustrations, and conclusion. The opening move in a sermon's development is extremely important. Every part of the sermon is important, but the task of the introduction is unique and crucial to the outcome of the sermon.

As Fasol points out (1989:64), it is worth remembering that a strong introduction is essential to effective preaching. Perhaps the only time in the entire sermon during which most, if not all, the congregation will be listening attentively is during the opening statement.

The following section will explain the importance relating to influence on both the preacher and the hearers.

### **3.1.1 A sermon's introduction affects the preacher**

This section will establish the influence of a sermon's introduction on the preacher.

#### **3.1.1.1 *The preacher can gain or lose attention***

When preachers stand at the altar, all the hearers in the pews look at them and expect something. Therefore, the first sentence of a sermon is extremely important. A preacher can gain the hearers' attention or lose it during the first few minutes. Robinson (1980:160) states, "If the preacher does not capture attention in the first thirty seconds, he may never gain it at all."

If the preachers do not firmly grip their audiences' attention in the first few minutes, how can they hope to hold it to the end? If preachers do not snag the attention of those who hear him in the first few sentences they utter, it is unlikely that they will ever get it. Davis (1991:84) also comments, "If your opening fails to grab their interest, chances are slim that you will win them back later." According to Gibbs (1960:192), the introduction has well been called "the crucial five minutes." In this period, speakers will either gain or lose their audience. If the introduction fails to gain the sympathetic ears of the hearers, the sermon that follows will be lost on the audience.

Hence, the preachers should use a variety of methods to capture the attention

of the hearers. The first few minutes of the sermon are crucial. During this time, the ministers will either gain or lose the attention of their congregation. Ford (1979:215) propounds, “The introduction of the sermon is of overwhelming importance. If the preacher does not capture and hold the attention in the first two minutes, he is unlikely to recapture it.”

Practically speaking, during the introduction, audiences gain impressions of speakers that often determine whether or not they will accept what the speakers say. Gibbs (1960:192) relates, “A young preacher asked an older brother what was the best method of securing the attention of an audience. The somewhat brusque but wise reply was: ‘Give it something to attend to!’”

According to Jones (1958:159-60), often, the first sentence or two and always the first paragraph are crucial. If a preacher does not grip the interest of the people by that time, he/she may fail to grip it at all. For this reason most capable preachers spend a good deal of time devising arresting, unusual ways of beginning their introduction. The one reason for the importance of the sermon’s introduction is that the hearers can pay attention, or not, during the sermon’s first few minutes.

#### **3.1.1.2 *It is like a first impression of the preacher.***

If the preacher and the hearers meet for the first time during the sermon’s introduction, it goes without saying that a first impression is extremely important. The initial impact of the introduction may even shape the final effect of the

message. Stated differently, usually, the first impression is lasting and not easily changed.

Sweazey (1976:94) comments, "The opening makes the first impression. It can give the preacher a flying start or a handicap. His opening sentences may set listeners for him or against him." In addition, first impressions are often lasting. The preacher can make that impression favourable for his/her message. Reu (1967:489) warns, "Do not forget that, as elsewhere so in public discourse, the first impression is often the decisive one."

Therefore, the success of the sermon often depends upon the first impressions that preachers make upon their hearers in their introductions to their sermons. If these impressions are favourable, their audiences will listen to the remaining part of the discourse with pleasure, attention and profit.

#### ***3.1.1.3 The introduction is vital, but often the sermon's weak part***

The introduction to a sermon is important, but most preachers neglect this part. The place of the sermon's introduction is negligible, but vital. In this phase, the introduction has been called "a preacher's cross." The sermon will succeed or fail depending largely upon whether the opening sentences do, or do not, seize the congregation. Jones (1958:154) contends, "The two parts of the sermon most easily ruined are the introduction and the conclusion. Without doubt they are consistently the weakest parts of the average sermon."



A sermon's introduction and conclusion are small sections, but they are extremely vital for the success of the sermon (Van Cleave 1943:61). As Mayhue points out (1992:242), The three "undervalued" components of expository sermon preparation include the introductions, illustrations, and conclusions.... In contrast, the congregation eagerly looks forward to how their pastor will handle these three elements of the message.

Thus, in order to succeed in the whole sermon, the preacher should consider the introduction to the sermon.

#### ***3.1.1.4 The preacher should consider the importance of the introduction to the sermon***

Generally speaking, most preachers believe that they do not need to prepare the sermon's first part thoroughly. However, preachers should pay attention to the introduction to achieve their purpose. They must prepare the introduction well. The introduction, though simple and uncomplicated, should be carefully prepared. It is not sufficient to write the word "introduction" at the head of the sermon and do nothing further by way of preparation.

This implies the great necessity for a most prayerful and careful preparation of the introduction. Robinson (1980:161) explains, "However he begins, the minister should make the most of his first twenty-five words to seize attention. An ear-grabbing opening promises that what follows may be worth thirty minutes of everyone's time."

For this reason, the introduction to a sermon must be designed with great care. The language of an introduction must be disciplined. Baumann (1972:137) observes, "A carefully prepared introduction is a bridge builder into the world of the Spirit." Cox (1985:169) recounts, "Charles R. Brown, an effective preacher and teacher of preachers, said that five sentences of his sermons were always carefully prepared and memorized; the first sentence and the last four." Therefore, most skilled preachers pay particular attention to the crafting of beginnings and endings of their sermons. Whatever happens to the rest of the sermon, the delivery of the introduction and conclusion must be well prepared (Sweazey 1976:94).

Kroll (1980:164) also observes, "A frequent mistake among preachers is to begin making an outline with the single word *introduction* and then continue immediately to outline the body of the message without returning to prepare the introduction."

As examined thus far, we can conclude that the sermon's introduction affects the success of a preacher's proclamation. The aim of this section has been to emphasize four key aspects of influence of the sermon's introduction on the preacher: Firstly, the preacher can gain or lose the hearers' attention. Secondly, the sermon's introduction represents a first impression of the preacher. Thirdly, the sermon's introduction is a vital but weak part of the whole sermon. Lastly, the preacher should consider its importance.

The next section will investigate the importance of the sermon's introduction relating to the hearers.

### **3.1.2 The introduction to a sermon affects the hearer**

As briefly mentioned above (3.1.1), the introduction to a sermon affects the preacher. This section will examine how the sermon's introduction also affects the hearer.

#### ***3.1.2.1 The hearer will decide whether, or not, to listen***

The reason why the sermon's introduction is vital is because the hearers decide whether, or not, to listen during the sermon's introduction. The whole of the introduction must arouse their interest. During the first two or more minutes of a sermon, people decide whether, or not, to listen to the Gospel. Persuasion, the ultimate aim of the sermon, generally begins with the introduction. Demaray (1978:67) argues, "Why is the introduction so important? Simply this: in the first two minutes you have your congregation or you don't."

Both the first and last sentences of a sermon are always interesting (Phelps 1908:229). If a preacher fails to gain his/her audience's attention with a captivating introduction, he/she has probably lost them for the rest of the message. Killinger (1985:80) also indicates, "If the beginning of the sermon accomplishes its purposes, people are well on their way to hearing the sermon; if it does not, the rest of the sermon will be uphill." According to Lim (2002:104),

a sermon's opening and conclusion are important. So, they must be crafted carefully. In preaching, the first three minutes are the most important. We either establish contact or break it.

In some sense, the hearers may be prejudiced against, and even antagonistic to, both the speaker and his/her theme. Therefore, one can readily appreciate how necessary it is for the speaker, at the very beginning of his/her sermon, to dissolve their prejudices, disarm their doubts and take them into his/her confidence. Kemper (1985:74) declares, "Once the interest of the congregation is lost, however, it is almost impossible to retrieve it." This implies that, from the first sentence, it is the preacher's responsibility to create a sense of expectancy so that the remainder of the sermon may be heard and acted upon. According to Vines (1985:138), during the first few minutes of a sermon, you either have your listeners with you or you do not.

Thus, by means of the sermon's introduction, the hearers will decide either to hear or not to hear the rest of the sermon.

### **3.1.2.2 *The hearer will follow the sermon well***

Another reason why the sermon's introduction affects the hearers is that they can follow the rest of the sermon easily during the first part of the sermon. If the preacher can achieve an arresting beginning, he/she may have their awed attention the whole time and be able securely to hide God's truth deep in their hearts. Long (1989:145) states, "If the sermon begins by raising some issue in

thoughtful and precise language, the hearers have every reason to expect that the rest of the sermon will also be thoughtful and precise.”

Sometimes, it happens that the preacher has a good story or an incident that he or she is eager to share with the congregation. So, it is used as the sermon's introduction. Then, to the congregation's confusion, the body of the sermon goes off in an entirely different direction, and the people in the pews are never quite certain what the sermon is all about.

Baumann (1972:137) observes, “When the introduction has succeeded, the listener can give an appropriate, satisfactory answer to the question of why he should listen.” Therefore, in this phase, the introduction is a vital part of the sermon, and the success of the entire message often depends upon the minister's ability to win the support of his/her hearers at the outset of the discourse (Braga 1969:103).

According to Phelps (1908:220-221), the theory of the introduction relates primarily to the mental state of the audience to respect the subject of discourse.... All good definitions of an introduction agree with this, that its characteristic idea is that of preparation of the hearers' minds. Stated differently, the introduction is of such importance as it requires thought to be given to the body of the sermon (Kroll 1980:164). Therefore, the hearers will catch up with the rest of the sermon by means of the sermon's introduction.

This section has examined the importance of the sermon's introduction relating

to the preacher and the hearers. In this phase, we can assume that preaching is interaction between the preacher and the hearers. Introductions establish a shared purpose between a speaker and an audience. Massey (1998:13) indicates, "The act of preaching involves preacher and hearers in a series of dynamic moments." According to Robinson (1980:167), there are three types of preacher: those to whom you *cannot* listen; those to whom you *can* listen; and those to whom you *must* listen. During the introduction, the congregation usually decides what kind of speaker is addressing them.

The conclusion we may draw from this section is that the sermon's introduction affects the hearers: it will allow them to decide to hear or not hear the rest of the sermon. That is, the sermon's introduction will determine how they will follow the body of the sermon.

Thus far, we have analyzed the importance of the introduction to a sermon, which affects the preacher to proclaim successfully and the hearers to receive the sermon effectively. The following section will examine the purposes of the sermon's introduction.

### **3.2 PURPOSES OF THE SERMON'S INTRODUCTION**

As mentioned before (3.1), our investigation has proved that the sermon's introduction is very important. It influences the preacher to pronounce productively and the hearers to accept the sermon effectively. In this section, we examine the purposes of an introduction to a sermon.

Every introduction should have a clear purpose – both for the preacher and the congregation. Preachers should ask themselves: why is an introduction to a sermon needed? There are various purposes that preachers may aim to accomplish by means of the introduction, but they can be summed up in three basic objectives: to gain attention; not to lose attention; to introduce a theme.

### **3.2.1 The introduction must gain attention**

One of the most important purposes of a sermon's introduction is to gain the hearers' attention. This implies that one purpose of the introduction is to gain attention of the congregation. Many scholars insist that one important purpose of the sermon's introduction is to gain attention of the congregation (Kemper 1985:74; Blackwood 1955:119; Vines 1985:137; Braga 1969:104-105; Hostetler 1986:12; Phelps 1908:228; Abbey 1973:175).

When the preacher begins to preach, the thoughts of many of the members of the assembly are elsewhere. Nobody is automatically interested in the message. One cannot assume that those in the audience are automatically interested in what will be said. One must create that interest. For this reason, the important purpose of the sermon's introduction is to grasp the congregation's attention. So, a good introduction is intended to arouse an interest for gripping it. This notion that the sermon's introduction is to arouse the listener's interest seems so obvious. Therefore, the opening words of a sermon need not be dramatic; they need not even be plain; but they must

pursue the hearers' minds, forcing them to listen.

Mayhue (1992:243) says, "Introduction is a time for everyone to acclimate to what follows the initial situation and to gain a sense of direction." The introduction puts the preacher and his/her hearers mentally in step with each other and captures and redirects the audience's attention to focus on the preacher and his/her message.

It is the business of the public speaker to present his/her matter in such an interesting way that the audience cannot help but listen and be interested. So, one of the purposes of an introduction is to awaken the interest of the audience in his/her theme. An introduction is successful if it creates interest, arouses attention, and serves to focus the concern of the audience on the speaker and his/her message. Interest lost in the introduction is hard to recover in the developing sermon. Introduction, that is, how to call the attention.

According to Morgan (1974:85-6), an introduction should create the atmosphere, depending upon the theme. Sometimes, it is good to indicate one's conviction of the supreme importance of the particular theme, sometimes declaring its gravity, sometimes suggesting its comfort, sometimes admitting its difficulty. All these aspects grasp the audience's attention.

It follows that the introduction to the sermon ought to be attention-grabbing. In other words, introductions have the task of allowing the hearers' ears to be pricked. If their interest is obtained at the beginning, there is a good possibility



of maintaining it to the end. The congregation may be settling down after the sermon's hymn, looking around the room. If the Scriptural reading just before the sermon was not interesting, the congregation's minds may have wandered. Buttrick (1987:86) observes, "Thus, focus is the main function of an introduction and focus can normally be achieved in a few sentences."

Stated differently, the introduction should act as an appetizer to make the listener eager to hear what is to follow. According to Gibbs (1960:190), an introduction that does not arouse the hearers' attention will leave the preacher without an audience when he/she reaches the discussion of his/her theme.

Therefore, it is essential that the hearer's attention be gained first, then sustained to the end. Cannon (2003:101) comments, "Sermonic introductions are a means of capturing the awareness of our hearers in that preliminary discussion through stimulating, motivating first sentence(s) at the beginning of the preliminary discussion. The introduction should inspire the hearers to want to listen to the rest of the sermon." Therefore, the preacher should use the opening of his/her speech to inspire the audience to want to hear what he/she will say.

Davis (1991:84,86) advises, "You must make the audience understand why you want to talk to them and make them believe that it is important to them. ... You should use the introduction to state your objective clearly and leave your audience eager for more." An introduction is a means of showing that you take both the subject and your audience seriously (Edwards 1982:74-75). According

to Gerlach and Balge (1978:79-80), the introduction raises a question in the hearer's mind, which the sermon promises to answer. It leaves him/her with the feeling, "I'm glad I'm here to find out what God says to me in answer to that question." It attains his/her interest.

An effective introduction commands the congregation's immediate attention without cheapening the message. Garrison (1954:165) states, "The introduction may function as a means of gaining good will." Reu (1967:486) comments, "The introduction must first of all arouse the hearer's interest, put him in a position to understand the truth and awaken a willingness to subject himself to it." Therefore, the introduction should be aimed at the disinterested, those who came to church because they were brought by spouses, parents or friends.

In conclusion, an introduction should exhibit good taste. The main purpose of the introduction is to develop interest in what is to follow. It is the introduction, which captures the audience's minds. Larsen (1995:112) declares, "The first task of the preacher in our contemporary climate for communication is to get the attention of the hearers."

The preacher must be sure that the opening sentences will grip the mind of his/her hearers instantly. If the preacher's first few sentences are not interesting, he/she will find it difficult to arouse interest later. So, the purpose of the sermon's introduction is to awaken the hearer's interest in the subject that has been chosen. Davis (1958:186) observes, "The often-repeated rules for

the introduction of a sermon are two: it should win attention; it should gain interest.”

Thus, the primary aim of the sermon’s introduction is to gain attention of the hearers.

### **3.2.2 The introduction must not lose attention**

As mentioned above (3.2.1), the purpose of the sermon’s introduction is to gain the hearers’ attention. This section will examine another purpose of the sermon’s introduction. In contrast to the previous section (3.2.1), the purpose of the sermon’s introduction is *not to lose* the hearers’ attention. According to Long (1989:135), a sermon’s introduction does not grab the hearers’ attention, which we have already said. It would be more accurate to say that a sermon’s introduction must not lose the listeners’ attention.

Sangster (1949:111) believes, “Most of our hearers give us their attention at the start.” The task of an introduction, then, is not to *get* their attention, but rather *not to lose it*. According to Nichols (1980:102-103), the rather more painful fact is that we already have their attention and their willingness as a free gift – for a while. What we have is their offer to participate in the preaching that is about to happen. We do not need to get it, but we surely do need to use it by establishing a contract for communication.

Therefore, another main purpose of the sermon’s introduction is not to lose the

hearers' attention. To do this, one presupposition should be obtained: the hearers are already paying attention to the preacher.

### **3.2.3 Introducing a theme**

As mentioned above (3.2.1 and 3.2.2), the purpose of the sermon's introduction is to gain the hearers' attention and not to lose their attention. In this section, we shall examine the last purpose of an introduction to a sermon, which is to introduce a topic. This means that sermon's introductions must establish contracts for communication between preachers and hearers.

In some sermons, orientation of the preaching may be quite full and complete; in others it may be only a hint of what is to come. Listeners only need to know that they are traveling on the right path, not necessarily the contours of the path. The preacher should begin a sermon in such a way that the hearers can accurately anticipate something of what the whole sermon will be about. So, the task of the introduction to the sermon is to point toward the aim of the sermon.

It is important to remember that an introduction must introduce a theme (Morgan 1974:80-81; Robinson 1980:164; Cox 1985:170; Broadus 1944:102; Jones 1958:155-156; Buttrick 1987:83-84; Fisher 1979:149; Smith 1984:43; Achtemeier 1995:64-65; Knecht 1986:284-285; Hoefler 1982:51; Koller 1965:78; Perry 1965:76; Vines 1985:137-138; Davis 1958:187; Hostetler 1986:77; Phelps 1908:230-231; Long 1989:138-139; Larsen 1995:112; Chung 1999:204)

Our aim should be to bring our hearers into sympathy with our own feeling and attune their minds into harmony with the subject we design to present. Robinson (1980:165) instructs, "The first point must then be linked to the second point by a strong transition and in the same way the second to the third, until the complete idea of the sermon emerges." According to Baumann (1972:136), the first moments of the sermon may answer one of two questions: What is he going to talk about? Quite simply, the introduction should introduce.

The task of the sermon's introduction is to do what its name implies: to introduce the whole sermon, to be a preview of coming attractions. This means both providing a taste of what the whole sermon will say and disclosing something of the plan that the sermon will follow. Cox (1985:165) comments, "The introduction presents the theme of the sermon or the question to which the sermon addresses itself." The introduction should successfully point forward to the main discussion then it must decrease, while the body of the sermon increases. This implies that if the introduction is too good, everything that follows will decline.

The introduction becomes an announcement of the agenda that the sermon will follow, which the listener can expect. The purpose of an introduction is to prepare the audience for what is to follow. It introduces the theme that relates to something that is to come. In other words, an introduction is a means to an end. When the people know what the sermon's subject is, they have a reason to listen. Braga (1969:109) declares, "The introduction should be aimed directly

at the subject of the sermon.”

Every introduction will provide hermeneutical orientation, intended or otherwise; so, for us, it may be useful to be aware of the process. Now, the speaker must proceed to take the audience into his/her confidence, and state clearly and succinctly why he/she has chosen the topic. The introduction is but a gate that leads directly to the body of the address. The purpose of an introduction is to lead the congregation into the matter to be discussed. To succeed, the introduction should introduce the subject.

Van Rensburg (2003:59) explains, “The introduction introduces the characters of the story.” The main requirement is that it actually introduces, and prepares the hearer for the subject. The introduction is only the porch, which the listener must cross in order to enter the main house. After the introduction, the hearers should have an idea where the total sermon will go, and they should also be ready to take the next step.

The conclusion that we may draw from this section is that the right but difficult way is to introduce the topic and arouse interest simultaneously, and so dispose people’s mind and hearts toward our message (Stott 1982:244). Gerlach and Balge (1978:80) advise, “Remember too that your purpose is not just to gain attention. But for what? Your purpose is also to establish the connection between the text and the theme in a way that arouses interest in the text and points to its practical value.”

The important point of the sermon's introduction is to be a bridge from the introduction to the body of the sermon. It guides the listener toward the sermon's structure. The structural contact leads to the main body of the sermon by revealing to the audience what is about to come. The structural contact of the sermon's introduction exists to bridge the gap between the introduction and the points of the sermon.

Hence, the last and important aim of the sermon's introduction is to introduce the body of the sermon. The hearers in the pews did not come to church to hear the introduction, but came to church to receive the Word of God. Therefore, the preacher should take the hearers to the main topic of the sermon.

### **3.3 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

This chapter has, firstly, examined the importance and purposes of the introduction to the sermon and investigated the importance of the sermon related to the preacher and the hearers. The sermon's introduction effectively affects the preacher's proclamation of the Word and the hearers' reception of the Word. Secondly, the purposes of the sermon's introduction have been examined, concentrating on three aspects: to gain attention; not to lose attention; and to introduce a theme.

Cannon (2003:105) cautions, "Be sure that the introduction is the servant to the sermon, never the master." As the basic purpose of every introduction is to

secure attention that will prepare the way for the introduction of the thesis or proposition, it should aim at the creation of an acceptable frame of mind and interest toward the speaker, and seek to underscore the relevance of the matters under discussion to the listeners and their needs. Crum (1977:26), wants a sermon to begin somewhere, to go somewhere, and to have something to happen.

The following chapter will examine the sources and qualities of an introduction to a sermon.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **SOURCES AND QUALITIES OF A SERMON'S INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter examined the importance and purposes of the sermon's introduction concerning two aspects: how the sermon's introduction affects the preacher as well as the hearers. This chapter will investigate the sources and qualities of an introduction to a sermon.

#### **4.1 SOURCES OF A SERMON'S INTRODUCTION**

This section will examine sources of the sermon, relating to text and context. The preacher should use a variety of resources for the sermon's introduction. However, the traditional way of introducing a sermon is to announce one's text. The value of this beginning is obvious: it turns many people off; they find it too traditional, too ecclesiastical and too dull. One important rule for the introduction to the sermon is that it should contain variety

Practically speaking, the idea for a sermon may be born in various sources – a passage of Scripture, congregational needs, an ethical issue, etc. Buttrick (1987:89) states, "All of the introductions combine audible and visual material." In some sense, the source of the introductory contents may be the text, the theme, the church's season, or any department of human life or experience. According to Lowry (1997:93), a good pastor will not wander around in the texts alone, but together with companions of congregation, culture, and liturgy.

Cleland (1965:45) states, “The Word of God is bifocal. It has its head in the heavens, but its feet are on the ground. Our Lord worked with both focuses.” This implies that, in the introduction, the preacher has two choices: he/she may begin with the contemporary moment and move to the text (inductive beginning), or he/she may begin with the text and bring the idea to the contemporary moment (deductive beginning). Abbey (1967:21) indicates, “Preacher’s notebook will go a dialogue between the text and his people from which will rise germinal insight for the sermon.”

According to Craddock (1985:85),

One focus is upon the listeners, including their contexts: personal, domestic, social, political, economic. The other is upon the biblical text, including its contexts: historical, theological, and literary. The distance between these two focuses is very real, consisting of factors of time, space, language, world view, and immediate circumstances.

It follows that there are always two centres of interest in a sound sermon – historical faith and the present day. Which is more important? The answer is: which focus is more important in drawing an ellipse? Both are indispensable. Together they form the Word of God.

In addition, another important rule is that a source should match the body of the sermon. Van Cleave (1943:63) argues, “What has his text to do with the context? It will often be best to introduce a sermon by showing the relation of the text to the context.” If an introduction is too general, it may seem oddly disconnected from the first move. If the introduction is too particular, it will,

subsequently, seem irrelevant to the whole sermon (Buttrick 1987:84).

It goes without saying that one of the most valuable insights for a homiletic method is Craddock's pastoral emphasis on the role of the assembly. The preacher must listen to the congregation, as well as the biblical text.

If the text is to interpret us, we must bring every available resource to our endeavour to understand it. We must see its meaning illuminated by its context. We must understand what it said to the human situation in its own time, and what bearing that has on what it says to us now, by careful orientation to its historical background and the situation that called it forth. According to Marty (1984:69), we have just approached one of the most difficult and yet necessary elements in coming to terms with what it is to take a text and open it for a congregation.

The possibilities for an opening statement that demands attention are as wide as a minister's creativity. However, the sources from which the preacher may draw introductions are extremely numerous and various. All introductions need not, and should not, be composed of exactly the same elements. But since the introductions of so many sermons consistently contain the same materials, saying that an introduction ordinarily should contain the following parts: text and context, is justified.

#### **4.1.1 Text**

This section will investigate the sources of the sermon's introduction relating to text. One useful type of introduction is textual – emphasizing the text by reading it, describing its context, historical background, and central idea. The passage itself can be the basis of attention. Kroll (1980:161) states, “Obviously the best place to start a textual sermon is with the text itself.” It has been said that a biblical text is among the most important traditional types of introduction - the preacher may go directly to the passage. The traditional way of using the text is simply to announce it at the outset. However, the textual approach of starting a sermon has been coming back into favour, for ministers everywhere have found that people like to hear sermons from the Bible. Jones (1958:155) recommends, “Christian preaching ought to be based squarely upon the Bible, the introduction is the logical place for the scriptural basis of a sermon to be indicated.”

According to Eslinger (1987:105), Craddock suggests five favourable factors that serve to establish points of contact between preacher and text: (1) First, the distance between ourselves and the original readers of the text is in a measure bridged by our common humanity. (2) The second favourable factor is the continuity of the church and its tradition of interpreting the text. (3) The third favourable factor is the existence within the church of the community of scholars whose service to the church is to preserve the text as it has been received, and to aid the church in understanding the text. (4) The fourth factor enabling interpretation is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church. (5) The fifth and final factor contributing to interpretation as a vital and fruitful endeavour is the text itself. Consequently, the preacher can start his/her

sermon by giving a brief, vivid picture of the biblical scene or central character of the text.

The following section will investigate, in detail, various kinds of texts as an introduction to a sermon.

#### **4.1.1.1 *Background of the text***

One of the most dominant sources for the text explains the text's background relating to Biblical manners and customs, or the geography of the country. Sometimes, a historical setting and background is definitely needed and constitutes a perfect introduction. Furthermore, Biblical geography is helpful for sermons on such topics as the transfiguration, the temptation, and Christ's crucifixion. Killinger (1985:86) declares, "There is vividness and helpfulness in this introduction. It provides a background against which the words of Scripture become far more dramatic than they appear at first reading."

For example, it would be difficult to give a sermon on Daniel chapter one without explaining the warfare between Judah and Babylon. The successive Babylonian invasions of Palestine need to be delineated and distinguished. In particular, speaking of Jesus' encounter with the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well should begin with some mention of the ancient custom of gathering water at such a community well, the centre of conversation in Palestine. Why was the woman at the well so late? What was the reason for the women to come to the well and not their husbands? Relating the customs of Jesus' day to this 20<sup>th</sup>-

century world is an invaluable way of beginning a sermon.

Evans (1964:68) suggests, "The geography of the Bible, a description of the mountain, plain, sea, or city in which the words were spoken or the event transpired, forms a good introduction."

Strange as it seems, an audience is always interested in the habits and customs of the peoples of other countries. The mode of dress, manner of living, customs of trade, habits of society, oriental marriage and funeral – these topics furnish instructive as well as interesting material for an introduction. According to Broadus (1944:103), wherever the meaning of the text requires explanation, this explanation may, of course, form the introduction.

#### **4.1.1.2 *The writer of the text***

Another type of source for the text is providing details of the writer of the text. Broadus (1944:103) suggests, "In other cases, some account of the writer of the text or of the condition of any particular persons whom he addressed may serve to interest hearers in the text or to prepare them for understanding it."

#### **4.1.1.3 *The word or phrase and construction of the text***

Another type of sources for the text is illustrating the word or phrase of the text. Gerlach and Balge (1978:86-87) state, "Occasionally it is effective to begin with a striking or a provocative word or phrase in the text.... If the reason is

significant, state the reason when you announce the text rather than in the introduction.”

In addition, the construction of the text is also useful as a source of the text. Evans (1964:67) comments, “It is thus evident that an interesting introduction can be made from the construction of the text.” Thus, the general familiarity with the words of the text will undoubtedly prove an interesting introduction.

The aim of this section has been to explain that the text itself can be a valuable source for the sermon’s introduction. However, Karl Barth overstates the case when he insists that every introduction must be biblical.

Consequently, the text itself can be a valuable source for the sermon’s introduction. Hearers generally are interested in the background of the text, the writer of the text, the construction of the text, and the word or phrase of the text.

The next section will examine sources for the introduction to the sermon, relating to context.

#### **4.1.2 Context**

As briefly mentioned above (4.1.1), one type of introduction can be textual. This section will examine another type of introduction, i.e. the context. The contextual method is another way of introducing a sermon; contextual introductions are always helpful. A minister needs a wide variety of ways of starting

sermons: desirable information, an aphorism, a question, a pointed illustration, a prose quotation, humor, news, a hard-hitting statement, arousing curiosity. The best way to arouse the interest of the congregation regularly is to use a variety of interesting materials in various ways. Even when the introduction begins with the context of the Biblical text, a problem should be posed immediately, a question raised, or an analogy drawn that shows that this text concerns the audience.

Cox (1985:170) advises,

Use a variety of beginnings. In the thirty-seven sermons in *The Twentieth Century Pulpit*, Vol 1, each of which is by a noted preacher, the first sentences begin as follows: fourteen with statements, eight with references to the text, five with stories or anecdotes, two with quotations, one with a personal reference, and one with a definition.

Perhaps the Apostle Paul often found it necessary to relate his experience on the Damascus Road in order to obtain a hearing from audiences who were suspicious of his authority, because of his pre-conversion persecutions of the Christians.

Consequently, the life experiences, the context of the hearers, are used to refer to that which is temporal, as opposed to eternal. It suggests the experience of life in the world, day by day, week by week. This temporal life constitutes an effective contact point for an introduction to a sermon and provides the best way to grab attention and establish relevance.

The next part will examine thoroughly various kinds of context as an



introduction to a sermon.

#### **4.1.2.1 A life-related story**

One can firstly use a life-related story as a sermon's introduction. Stated differently, a popular introductory technique is known as the life-situation method. Today, this method is accepted as valid and Biblical, and it serves its purpose well. A life-related story is always interesting; people always interest other people. Speech comes alive as it is personalized. Thus the introduction should be related to life. Therefore, it should find people where they are and join them in an adventure that takes them where they want, or need to, go.

Most sermons should begin with the listener's life experience. I call this "secular," derived from the Latin word *saeculum*, which means 'age' or 'time.' (Hostetler 1986:17).

The sermon's introduction must relate to the people's personal needs. The preacher must start where his/her hearers are. Baumann (1972:139) observes, "People are living in today; hence the sermon should begin where they are." Hence, the interpreter also needs to look carefully at contemporary life.

Baumann (1972:139) further indicates, "Secular introductions stamp a message with contemporaneity." According to Adams (1982:63), the purpose of the story is to capture the listener's attention and direct it toward the truth of the Biblical passage; it must not create interest in the story itself, for itself.

Hoefler (1982:46) points out:

Consider the following introduction for a sermon on Judas. It is doubtful that any of you men here this evening have the given name of Judas. We frequently name our children John, James, and Peter. But no one would consider naming their bouncing baby boy Judas. For Judas is remembered not as a disciple but as a traitor.

Furthermore, an important rule is that the context should naturally lead the congregation to the text. Baumann (1972:137) points out,

Make the transition from the natural to the spiritual. Jesus, the master teacher and preacher, practiced this law. When He spoke with the woman of Samaria He did not begin referring to spiritual truths and theology. He began rather with a discussion of water, and then inquired if she would provide a drink for Him.

According to Cannon (2003:104), one must begin with a shared experience known to all, then proceed to the new truth. The introduction must move naturally from the listener's life to the Word of God. Baumann (1972:137) also points out, "His movement was from things natural to things spiritual. He moved from that which she knew to that which she ought to know."

The preacher can set the stage for the message by telling a story. It follows that the story will actually be related to what you wish to talk about. If a truly apt story is found, it constitutes one of the most attractive types of introduction. Jesus used what was well known to teach profound spiritual truths – a fig tree, children, birds, wine, the wind, shepherds, and so forth. He started where people were and took them where He wanted them to be.

Public speakers widely use narrative approaches with success (Van Cleave (1943:65). According to Kroll (1980:162), nothing gains attention like a good story, especially a personal one. It makes the congregation feel like they are a part of the speaker.

Thus, a life-related story can be a useful resource for the sermon's introduction.

#### **4.1.2.2 *Rhetorical questions***

Another type of introduction to a sermon can be a rhetorical question, which can be an effective method of gaining interest. It goes without saying that questions automatically arouse an audience's interest. The preacher can open the message with a startling question to gain the congregation's attention. Therefore, rhetorical questions call for attention. The preacher may start with a paradox: for example, many children of God live as though they were orphans.

According to Sweazey (1976:99), Stewart asked a provocative question: "How do you regard human life? I suppose the three most frequent descriptions of life, the three most popular pictures, are these – a battle, a voyage, and a march." This proves how a question can be an excellent start. It sets minds working and draws the preacher and the congregation together.

Thus, a rhetorical question is also enough to gain the hearers' attention and a useful resource for the sermon's introduction.

#### **4.1.2.3 *The church year***

The church year can be a good source of introductory material. This implies that the material of the church year may also help to emphasize the unity of the service. If the sermon has reference to some particular season of the year, one may begin by remarking upon the occasion. In other words, the church season may be used as a source for the introduction, provided the hearers have some knowledge of the church year and provided the text actually relates to the season.

According to Gerlach and Balge (1978:86), it is perhaps the most difficult to make introductions of this type interesting. You must be careful not just to say the obvious. On the other hand, a skilful use of this type of material may serve not only to introduce the theme, but also to help Christians improve their understanding of, and appreciation for, the church year.

#### **4.1.2.4 *Current events***

Current events can also be a useful source for a sermon's introduction. This implies that current events usually are quite striking and make excellent introductions to sermons if they are relevant to the theme. There is one caution: the people in the pews will continue to think and will not follow the sermon (Van Cleave 1943:66).

Stott (1982:245) recounts,

Soon after the terrible earthquake of 1976 had devastated the country, killed 23,000 people and rendered more than a million homeless, it is more natural to begin somewhat as follows: 'We have met this morning in great sorrow. Many of us have lost a relative or friend. Others have lost their home and possessions. Why does God allow such disasters? That is the question in all our hearts and minds. How can we still believe in a God of love?'

Therefore, a current event can be an interesting resource for the introduction to the sermon.

#### **4.1.2.5 Humour**

Humour can also be used as an introduction to a sermon; it has a legitimate place in preaching if used with caution. Often, the introduction is the most appropriate place for it. However, humorous introductions are especially prone to irrelevance. When used properly, humour can be a very effective introduction, but what is most difficult about beginning with a joke, is finding one that really relates to the sermon's topic.

Robinson (1980:166) warns, "Use humor carefully. If it directs attention to the idea, laughter serves as a splendid tool. When it merely entertains, humor makes the sermon seem like a letdown."

Humour, or a funny experience, always gets a speech off to a good start. However, there are two things that should be remembered about using humour in the pulpit. First, if you tell a humorous anecdote, make sure that it is really

funny. If it falls flat, you have defeated the purpose of the introduction. Secondly, the preacher must take care of the type and amount of humor used in association with the Word of God. Good taste should be applied and humor should not be overdone. The house of God is not a nightclub, nor is a sermon a comedy routine.

It goes without saying that the preacher should not tell a funny story just for the sake of telling it. He/she must allow the humour to point toward what is intended to be communicated to the listeners. Otherwise, after a funny story, a preacher will probably have to design a second introduction to refocus the congregation. Hence, humor can also be a good resource for the sermon's introduction.

#### **4.1.2.6 *Explaining the topic***

One can also use an explanation of the topic as the sermon's introduction. Kroll (1980:161) advises, "If the sermon is a topical one you might begin by explaining something about the subject." Hence, explaining the topic can also be a valuable resource for the sermon's introduction. The hearers pay attention to the preacher because they understand the reason why they should hear the topic.

#### **4.1.2.7 *Combination of context***

In addition, many scholars suggest that the preacher should use a variety of

introductions from contextual resources to commence the sermon. Many forms of secular introductions to sermons are available: an incident from life or literature, a brief story, an aphorism, a letter, a quotation, a news item, a cartoon, lines from a poem or hymn, reference to a book, a bit of conversation or dialogue, reference to the season or the occasion, a problem, a difficulty, or a question. This interesting material is most often used at the beginning of the introduction.

Many scholars believe that the preacher should utilize various materials in the sermon's introduction (Mayhue 1992:245; Hoefler 1982:48; Skinner 1973:172; White 1973:120-121; Craddock 1971:143; Lloyd-Jones 1971:193; Nichols 1963:30; Blackwood 1955:126-132; Gilman, Aly & Reid 1951:70).

Thus far, a contextual type of subject in the sermon's introduction has been examined. The main purpose for the usage of context is to lead the message effectively. Thus, the context provides interesting as well as instructive material for an introduction.

When it comes to the relationship of the secular to the biblical, it is most important to note that sermon delivery and preparation take opposite courses. In the preparation, the Bible comes first. While preparing the message, the preacher moves from the Bible to the newspaper. Sermon delivery is just the opposite. Successful introductions move from the newspaper to the Bible. We must keep in mind that a preacher must move both ways with every sermon.

Generally speaking, a successful introduction starts with a secular feature. The preachers can find secular references in both their reading and experience that relate well to their sermons' topics and to their audiences, as they know them. Sometimes, preachers may simply explain the purpose of their message. The cultivation of a style and manner of delivery that build effective-rapport with hearers is needed. Preachers should give them simple messages from the heart, then they will respond.

The conclusion to be drawn from this section is that the preacher can utilize text and context as the sermon's introduction; however, the main point being that a single pattern should be avoided. The preacher should use a variety of methods with which to begin the sermon.

The following section will examine qualities of an introduction to a sermon.

## **4.2 QUALITIES OF A SERMON'S INTRODUCTION**

The previous section investigated sources for a sermon relating to text and context. This section will examine both positive and negative qualities of an introduction to a sermon.

### **4.2.1 Positive qualities of a sermon's introduction**

It goes without saying that every sermon starts with an opening sentence, on which effective preachers concentrate. The opening sentence characterizes



the whole introduction and deserves the closest attention. The positive qualities of the sermon's introduction will firstly be investigated. Although there are several provisos for positive qualities, seven items will now be described as positive qualities.

#### **4.2.1.1 *An introduction should be brief***

The most important requirement of an introduction to a sermon is brevity. In these days of hurriedness and competition, hearers appreciate the preacher going straight to the point with as little delay as possible.

Many scholars state that the sermon's introduction should be brief (e.g. Robinson 1980:165; Buttrick 1987:87; Knecht 1986:297; Hoefler 1982:50-51; Achtemeier 1995:65; Gibbs 1960:193-195; Gerlach & Balge 1978:82; White 1973:117; Dabney 1979:145; Blackwood 1955:120; Vines 1985:139; Nichols 1963:31; Braga 1969:105; Braga 1969:109; Broadus 1944:107; Sangster 1949:125; Sweazey 1976:97).

In other words, a lengthy introduction tires people. Cannon (2003:103) states, "The one sermonic porch may be elaborate, but it is still one porch. We need only one porch to a house, not two front porches." For this reason, a good introduction is brief. Generally, the introduction should consist of a single thought. One must not keep the people waiting too long on the porch, but let them into the house as soon as possible to see its furniture and enjoy its comforts. Today, the sermon does not run as long as in Puritan times, and the

introduction tends to be shorter for much the same reason that the porch of a bungalow is not as large as that of a country mansion.

Evans (1964:71) comments, "On opening a book, if one is confronted with a preface covering some twenty or thirty pages, he is likely to become discouraged and lay the book down." The introduction should be long enough to accomplish only its implied purpose and no longer. Vines (1985:138) also advises, "Do not spend too much time in the introduction. Avoid every word that is not absolutely necessary."

Everyone resents the person who takes 30 minutes to introduce a speaker. So, too, they are annoyed when that speaker takes half his/her time approaching the subject. The preacher should not keep the audience waiting on the porch, but should usher them into the house as soon as convenient. Normally the introduction should be brief. Of course, the introduction may sometimes be much longer than would generally be proper. Usually, the preacher needs to approach the subject gradually; but must avoid any tendency to be tedious.

#### ***4.2.1.2 It should be interesting***

It goes without saying that the introduction to the sermon should be interesting; it is a sin to be dull at any point in the sermon. The opening lines must generate interest or curiosity. Ford (1979:215) comments, "Television has taught us that unless a speaker establishes two points about himself in the first minute, namely, that he is going to be interesting, and that he is authoritative,

viewers will switch to another channel.” Dullness and holiness are not synonymous. Essentially, the Gospel is a vital and exciting message; it is good news, not bad news. Many scholars indicate that the sermon’s introduction should be interesting (e.g., Cox 1985:166, Van Cleave 1943:62; Blackwood 1955:133; Oman 1963:152; Oman 1963:152; Braga 1969:106; Abbey 1973:175).

The beginning of a sermon may stimulate interest and attention. Cox (1976:63) says, “The following opening sentence touches the hearer at a variety of sensitive points. ‘My career as a minister began during World War 1.’” Sangster (1949:125) argues, “Can it be understood and received if it is not made interesting? It must be made interesting and nowhere more interesting than when it begins.”

Therefore, a good introduction should stir interest in the content of the preacher’s talk. Jones (1958:160) advises, “Let it be said again: deliberately and intentionally search for an arresting, striking, and if necessary a ‘shocking’ way to begin.” The whole of the introduction must arouse interest.

A writer on “public speaking” has a good formula for an introduction, which is, “start a fire” (Van Cleave 1943:62). According to Blackwood (1955:120), this word, “interest” points to what the speaker and the hearer possess in common. If the preacher is interested, the congregation is likely also to be interested. You must be sure to put yourself into the introduction with your best thought and energy.

#### **4.2.1.3 *It should be life-related***

An introduction to a sermon should be life-related to attract the hearers' attention. Many homiletic books suggest that introductions should begin with people, with the congregation's specific needs or experiences and many scholars believe that the sermon's introduction should be life-related (Cox 1985:166; Jones 1958:157; Buttrick 1987:91-92; Hoefler 1982:51; Ireson 1982:37; Larsen 1995:113; Braga 1969:106; Lischer 1981:20; Packer 1990:188; Hostetler 1986:68; Fant 1975:42; Lowry 1980:24; Allen 1988:38; Phelps 1908:233-234).

If the preacher will discuss something later about which the congregation may have little or inadequate knowledge, first talk about an issue about which the people know much, something to which they can relate the new information or understanding. If the introduction begins with a thought that arrests attention and arouses interest, then keep the hearer interested by incorporating a life-related story.

Therefore, early in the sermon, listeners should realize that the pastor is talking to them about themselves. Cox (1985:169) observes, "This is one of the contributions of Herbart's educational theory: broaden the range of knowledge by beginning with the knowledge the learner already has; move from the known to the unknown."

The introduction serves to make a transfer or bridge from the natural to the spiritual. Introductions should immediately awaken the congregation's interest by informing them that the sermon will be something about their lives. Life-situation interests should mark introductions. Therefore, a sermon should begin with the audience's lives and then take them to the Word of God.

According to Crum (1977:26), I found that 80 percent of the people thought that person-to-person communication had the greatest effect on them. Sadly, only 20 percent had heard preaching which they felt was person-to-person. Too often preaching was felt to be unrealistic platitudes or addressed to everybody in general and no one in particular.

It has been said that it is always a safe principle to begin with an audience where they are. Craddock (1985:95) suggests, "A pastor's preaching should touch life at the level of its deepest and profound joys." Consequently, if the preacher can begin his/her sermon with that which is of vital concern to the people, or which appeals to them, he/she will gain their attention at the outset and prepare them for the message about to be delivered.

#### **4.2.1.4 *The introduction should be appropriate***

The sermon's introduction should be appropriate to the topic. If the introduction could possibly be used for any other sermon, it will not be a good for this sermon. Many scholars believe that the sermon's introduction should be appropriate (Dabney 1979:144; Crum 1977:26; Ford 1979:216; White

1973:118; Gibbs 1960:193; Blackwood 1955:121; Broadus 1944:105; Phelps 1908:231).

The introduction must, of necessity, fit that sermon. Craddock (1985:92) says, "Many otherwise good sermons make no contact because they are to wrong people at the wrong time." The introduction must present some thought closely related to the theme of discourse, so as to lead naturally to the theme. A good introduction would, in general, be adapted to the particular discourse. Cannon (2003:103) also notes, "Each sermon should have its own, particular unique introduction. If an introduction can fit two sermons, it is probably good for neither."

Therefore, an introduction should be specific. That is, it should be prepared for one specific sermon. A good introduction contains a clear statement of the sermon's theme and purpose. Davis (1991:86) states, "The introduction should make very clear what the focus of the message is going to be. No unrelated jokes or stories here." According to Davis (1958:187-188), no two sermons are alike, and no two should begin the same way. If the introduction could possibly be used for any other sermon than this, it is not good for this sermon.

#### **4.2.1.5 *An introduction should be modest***

One of the most important qualities is modesty. The preacher should not allow the introduction to be too good, which might sound strange, but it is true. The introduction must not be the climax of the sermon, as the preacher has the

entire sermon ahead and it must have good progression. The introduction should not be so dramatic that everything else about the sermon seems dull by comparison. Evans (1964:71) comments, "Some preachers promise a good deal more in the introduction to the sermon than they are able to fulfill in the sermon proper."

For this reason, an introduction should promise no more than the preacher can deliver. To say that you will answer the problem of race in an introduction is egotistical. To say, for instance, that your purpose this morning is to settle the question of eschatology is also highly presumptuous. Robinson (1980:165) states, "An introduction should not promise more than it delivers. When it does, it is like firing off a cannon to shoot out a pea." It should not promise more than the sermon can supply.

#### ***4.2.1.6 The introduction should be purposeful***

An introduction to a sermon should also be purposeful; the theme should be clearly stated, sometimes by a corrected view of the text. Bowie (1954:165) states, "In every sermon which is to be enriching the two realities must be married: the truth of God and the need of man." It is clear: purpose is the controlling factor in preaching. No wonder all is lost without a clear purpose. Galli and Larson (1994:49) teach, "Sermons need a purpose. The purpose says what the sermon should do, more particularly, what the listener will do as a result of the sermon."

Adams (1982:12) says, “I believe that what I have said about purpose is the most important word I could speak to you about preaching. If you take it to heart, it could be a vital factor in your ministry.”

#### ***4.2.1.7 The introduction should be audience-centred***

A sermon's introduction should become audience-centred; it is better to begin with the congregation. The object in doing so is to help them to approach the reading and exposition of the preaching portion with understanding and concern. The idea is to orient the congregation to the Scripture by showing them its relevance. Buttrick (1987:96) states, “Writing an introduction for the sake of a congregation and not as a form of self-expression. Motto for introductions: Love your neighbors – in the pews.”

Practically speaking, the effectiveness of preaching is enhanced when it is clearly a word spoken from person to person. Hoefler (1982:47) also suggests, “If we are sensitive to the congregation, maintain a close personal contact with them and their daily lives, we will be able to recognize common needs and interests that apply to most of the listeners.”

According to Allen (1988:37), “Most of the time, preachers should avoid generic terms like ‘one’, ‘humankind’ or ‘people.’ These terms, and their cousins, will not usually get under the skin of the listener. Consider the difference between these two statements: God speaks to humankind. God speaks to you.”



It follows that the preacher should start where the people are and then lead them through the text in a treasure hunt.

#### **4.2.1.8 Conclusion**

Thus far, the positive qualities of a sermon's introduction have been examined: brief, interesting, life-related, appropriate, modest, purposeful and audience-centred.

The conclusion to be drawn from this section is that an introduction should be in accordance with the interests, objectives, and feelings common to the hearers (Gilman, Aly & Reid 1951:69).

George Buttrick mentions four characteristics of a good introduction: the raising of an issue, brevity, interest, and appropriateness (Demaray 1978:75). Garrison (1954:168) also believes that, "In general, any type of introduction is valuable provided that it is interesting, pertinent and relatively brief." According to Fisher (1979:144), "Do not try to be clever in shaping the introduction. Let the introduction be honest, accurate, brief; get to the body of the sermon quickly."

The next section will examine negative qualities of an introduction to a sermon.

#### **4.2.2 Negative qualities of a sermon's introduction**

The previous section (4.2.1) investigated positive qualities of a sermon's introduction. This section will examine negative qualities of an introduction to a sermon.

#### **4.2.2.1 *An introduction should not be apologetic***

It is a mistake to begin a sermon with an apology, for example, a beginning with excuses about personal ailments or about lack of time for preparation because of a busy schedule. Anything for which one feels called upon to apologize should be avoided or omitted. Many scholars insist that the preacher should not be apologetic in the sermon's introduction (Lim 2002:108; Vines 1985:140; Sweazey 1976:97; Nichols 1963:30; Broadus 1944:104; Garrison 1954:167; Van Cleave 1943:63).

A sermon should not be opened with an apology. Through an apology the speaker hopes to win sympathy; at best he/she gains pity and will not persuade the congregation. If the preacher is unprepared, let the congregation discover it for themselves. In many cases, they will never find out. Baumann (1972:142) recommends, "The preacher ought to avoid apologies: 'I didn't have much time to prepare'; 'I am not happy with this message'; 'I left my notes at home'; 'I am not much of a preacher.' Stand up, preach, let the people make their own evaluation."

Cannon (2003:105) states, "The quickest way to kill interest is to tell people not

to expect anything worthy of their attention. If you are too sick, or haven't had time to prepare, for goodness sake, sit down and let the choir take over." Therefore, it is safe to advise that the preacher should never make any kind of apology in the introduction. If he/she has had insufficient time to prepare, he/she should simply ask God's help and go ahead, because an apology does not make what has hastily been prepared any better.

No matter what its nature – whether speakers have a sore throat, did not sleep well the night before, had lost their notes, or feel generally inadequate to meet the demands of the occasion – their apology is likely to be uninteresting and inopportune.

#### ***4.2.2.2 The introduction should not be stereotyped***

One should beware of set phrases and stereotyped forms of introduction; the audience very soon recognizes them, and the effect is then anything but what awakens interest and excites curiosity. Nowhere, is the stimulus and charm of variety more important, and this is best attained by habitually seeking to give the introduction a specific and exact adaptation. One should never permit oneself to fall into the habit of introducing the sermon the same way every time, and never permit the congregation to expect this. Jones (1958:160) comments, "Avoid triteness and platitudes. Don't let anyone call you 'Dr. Obvious.' Avoid any slavish adherence to the mere conventional and traditional in the way to begin. Practice variety, variety, variety!" According to Cox (1976:62), one preacher's invariable method of beginning his sermon was to announce his

text by saying, “This is a very significant verse.” A member of his congregation remarked, “The verse may be significant, but why does he have to begin so insignificantly every time?”

Demaray (1978:77) states, “‘Never do the same thing always’ is a sound homiletical law.” It is an especially serious fault when you develop a form for introductions that you employ with little or no variation. According to White (1973:117),

Introductions fail if they are too predictable. Some men always begin with the context, or with a problem, or by arguing with some recent public statement, or by mentioning the name of the book that prompted the theme. As soon as the text is announced, or even the hymn before the sermon, habitual listeners can foresee how the preacher will begin.

Therefore, preachers should not begin each sermon in the same way, but employ different approaches from week to week. The more they vary their introduction, the better. A good introduction should not be stereotyped. Variety is the key - the same words or expressions should not always be used.

Blackwood (1955:123) instructs:

From sermon to sermon, variety has much to do with interest. If a minister speaks to some of the same persons Sunday after Sunday, how can he keep from starting in much the same fashion? By checking up on his past sermons, by searching out new pathways, and by studying introductions from other men. Make use of variety in your introductions. When your listeners know you are going to begin each sermon the same way they will be prepared to give you only their inattention, not attention.

One preacher got into the habit of beginning his sermons after he had

announced his text, “This is a very significant verse.” After a while, these opening words tended to trivialize every text he used. If there is a sermon book containing 25 sermons, the reader may find 12 different kinds of introduction.

#### **4.2.2.3 *The introduction should not be complex***

The preacher specializes in “porch-building” rather than “house-building.” Usually, they build two or three front porches to all their houses, as if the congregation would rather linger on the porches than live in the houses. We do not want a porch to a porch. A multiplicity of ideas is inconsistent with both clarity and interest. The introduction to the sermon should have only one idea. Having several ideas in the introduction is like having several persons introducing a speaker.

Erdahl (1976:58) observes, “When I can’t understand a sermon, I wonder is it because the preacher is so profound or because he is so confused? Sometimes I’m quite sure the problem is not just my stupidity but the preacher’s lack of clarity.” Furthermore, Erdahl (1976:70) says that someone has said that the three most important rules for the preacher are (1) be clear, (2) be clear, (3) be clear. This overstatement reflects our listener’s concern that our sermons must be clearly ordered and expressed.

An important rule is that the introduction should contain few and only important thoughts - if possible, only one.

#### **4.2.2.4 *An introduction should not be polemic***

The opinion of the majority seems to be that the start of a sermon should be calm, delicate, low-keyed. Quiet earnestness may attract attention better than excitement. Sweazey (1976:94) also remarks, "Plays usually start with a few throwaway lines so that the actors' voices and the hearers' can be getting adjusted."

An introduction should not be polemical, even though the sermon is polemical. Nervousness occasionally makes the voice high and squeaky. Therefore, a preacher needs control in order to speak his/her opening words in a composed, relaxed manner. A deep breath before starting puts a speaker at ease. According to Phelps (1908:235), "Begin the discussion of bold opinions as the new moon begins - with a crescent expression only."

The introduction may suggest the subject that will be treated polemically in the sermon, but the polemic itself, if it is textual, will be presented together with the exposition of the text. The introduction may present the need for the polemic, but not the matter of it. Dabney (1979:149) pronounces, "In warmth of tone the introduction should bear a due relation to the state of feeling which, at the beginning, prevails among the hearers." The preacher should not begin in a loud tone of voice or in a sensational manner. It is best to begin by speaking slowly and in a low tone of voice, warming up to the subject gradually, then working up to a climax.

#### **4.2.2.5 *The introduction should not digress***

If a purpose of the introduction is to help the sermon accomplish its specific purpose, and if it is to help the hearer focus his/her attention on the thematic thought for the day, then the introduction must never begin far afield. Avoid any paragraphs or sentences that unfocus and blur the picture and which necessitate a refocusing before the preacher can announce the theme. Vines (1985:140) warns, "Avoid the misleading introduction. When the preacher proposes one subject and preaches on another, the people feel betrayed. Introduce your subject, then stick to it."

In this phase, personal experiences are devastating in an introduction. The problem is a split of focus; the congregation will focus on you. Personal illustrations may be used in the body of a sermon. An obscure introduction invariably gives the impression that the whole sermon will be obscure. According to Broadus (1944:106), it is desirable to avoid the practice of beginning with some very broad and commonplace generality, as with reference to human nature or life, to the universe or the Divine Being.

#### **4.2.2.6 *Conclusion***

This section has investigated the negative qualities of an introduction to a sermon: apologetic, stereotype, complex, polemic and digressing. We can summarize and synthesize these qualities. Perry (1965:77) advises, "There are several items which should be avoided in an introduction. This list would

include flattery, apologies, triteness and complexity.” According to Skinner (1973:172), All apologies, banalities, and most irrelevant humor ought to be avoided.

#### **4.3 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

This chapter firstly investigated sources of a sermon’s introduction. The preacher can utilize text and context in the sermon’s introduction. One important rule for an introduction to a sermon is to avoid the same pattern; a preacher should use various methods to commence the sermon.

Secondly, qualities of a sermon’s introduction have been examined concentrating on two aspects: positive and negative qualities. The preacher must use positive qualities to attain his/her purpose and must avoid using negative qualities. A final comment: there are many different ways of introducing a sermon, and the preacher should make him-/herself master of them.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **IMAGES AND EXAMPLES OF A SERMON'S INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter investigated the sources and qualities of an introduction to a sermon. This chapter will demonstrate four images – those relating to God, the text, the preacher and the congregation – all related to the sermon's introduction. Then, good and bad examples of each of the four images will be discussed.

#### **5.1 FOUR IMAGES IN THE SERMON'S INTRODUCTION**

When we ponder on the subject of a sermon's introduction, we recognize that we could implement various ones for the introduction to the sermon. In order to establish the category of the sermon, we can divide most sermons into four images. One can obtain good advice about four images from Cilliers (2006:11). The Heidelberg method of sermon analysis seeks the inner dynamics of the text. This enquiry is systematized with the assistance of four basic homiletical questions: Which God is at issue here? What are this God's characteristics and how does He behave? How is the biblical text included in the sermon? How does the preacher him-/herself function in the sermon? What kind of congregation does the sermon appeal to, and imply? What is the relation to the world/other group?

### **5.1.1 God-images and a sermon's introduction**

The preacher should reveal a God-image to the congregation in the sermon's first step. Thus, in this study, the related questions to be examined will be: how can we provide a God-image in the sermon's introduction? What roles do God-images play in relation to the sermon's introduction? A good answer can be found in Bohren (1980) and Cilliers (2004).

When we admit the sermon to be the work of the Holy Spirit, we find a homiletical answer to help us to overcome the human impossibility in preaching. Moreover, the work of the Holy Spirit in preaching enhances the divine nature of our subject. We can express this divine dimension of preaching in terms of the naming of God.

According to Bohren (1980), the pneumatological foundation for the possibility of preaching needs a complementary description of the divine nature of preaching. He identifies one of the divine natures of preaching in terms of the naming of God. For him, to preach is to pronounce God's Name, to hallow His Name. Those who call His name come before Him, and His voice is audible.

According to Cilliers (2004), there are moments when your heart is warmed in a worship service: this could be during a hymn, in a phrase of the minister's sermon, in the experience of community with other believers, or during the breaking of the bread of Holy Communion. Moments when you just know: we are not alone, and outsiders too often call out: "God is really among you" (1

Cor 14:25)

#### **5.1.1.1 *Examples of a sermon's introduction that relate to God-images***

The following introduction to a sermon is based on Mark 9:2-8:

In the San Marco museum in Florence, there is a remarkable painting by the 15<sup>th</sup> century artist, Fra Angelico. It portrays the transfiguration of Christ on the mountain, and the figure of Christ, which forms the focal point, fills virtually the whole painting. He stands with arms outstretched, surrounded by a heavenly white light. At the edge of the painting – literally and figuratively – one sees the frightened disciples, Peter, James and John. At the sides, inter alia, also Moses and Elijah look inward, worshipping the glorified Christ.

The longer one looks at the painting, the more one discovers in it – as is the case with good art. In the forefront, as it were, as the first dimension, naturally, is the glorified Christ, the Lord of the history and the world, the King of the church. However, if you look a little deeper, you see the second dimension: Christ's arms are stretched out exactly like they were on the cross, with his palms turned to the front, as they were nailed to the cross. The painting wants to say: the One who is glorified, is nobody else but the One who would be crucified and the One who would be crucified, is the One who is glorified (Cilliers 2004:84).

This introduction is not dull, because Cilliers uses skilful comparisons between the picture and its spiritual meaning. To illustrate the glorified Christ, he presents an example of one picture. The audience can experience the God-image through this sermon's introduction. They can see and hear the crucified and glorified Christ. One advantage of this introduction is that the audience can imagine and depict the event of the cross.

The following introduction to a sermon relates to Luke 3:1-14:

Advent is a time of expectation. In it the Bible becomes a textbook of expectation. It teaches us what we may expect in life, what is important to us. And it says that what is important to us in life is not this or that, but God. We expect too little if we do not wait on God. We do not yet have the right expectation if we do not notice that we dispense with God in the dark hours of our lives. We go wrong if we do not detect in joy that God's presence has touched us. But above all, we have illusions if we think that this expectation is without risk. On the contrary, it leads us into the wilderness – into a wilderness beyond life, beyond society, beyond our familiar self. The great teacher of this expectation is John the Baptist. He calls us into the wilderness in order to expect God there, and my task today will be to call your ideas and imaginations into the wilderness (Theissen 1995:148).

The preacher uses rhetorical skills. This preacher can aptly be named a great preacher of sense, appeal and imagination. He uses many metaphors borrowed from Scripture, the most prominent of which are the images of the wilderness. This introduction to a sermon will influence the audience.

A Korean preacher's introduction to a sermon based on Revelation 1:12-16 follows:

A church can be divided into two constituents. One is a spiritual component, and the other is a humanly component. On the one hand, the spiritual component encompasses the idea that a church is not solely a bevy of people. In a church there are elements which are not visible in this world and things which people are unaware of and hence not taken under consideration. These are the words of God, our worship to God, and the many skills given by God which are to be used to foster the growth of a church. Such skills are called gifts or blessings which are given and taught to us by God and not from the works of men.

On the other hand, there is the humanly component. This component reveals the truth that the people who constitute the church are indeed ordinary human beings. They are not angels or the Sons of God whom are separated and brought about together. They are people with ordinary needs and wants such

as food and clothing. They speak languages of this world and each with their own occupation. In this sense, a church certainly involves the humanly nature. These two components are necessities but, at the same time, a source of conflict. Hence there is a constant tension in the church - the tension of living in this world by following the ways of God and not by the ways of this world (Kim, Seo-teak 1997:98).

This man proves to be a good preacher and rhetorician. He succeeds in employing a rhetorical skill, such as dichotomy, which he uses in his explanation. In other words, the preacher wants to explain a dichotomy: a church can be divided into two equal parts: a human and a spiritual component. He demonstrates the work of God by means of this tension.

Consider the following introduction to a sermon with Ephesians 6:10-20 as text:

Some years ago, a church was putting together a hymnbook. A committee had to decide which hymns to keep, and which to discard. The committee got into an awful fight over 'Onward Christian Soldiers.' Some said the hymn was well loved and had to be kept, while others claimed it was militaristic and should be dumped. Well, if we have trouble with our hymns, what will we do with the Bible?

Almost every book of the Old Testament tells of battles, and the New Testament is not much better. 'Put on the whole armor of God,' cries Ephesians, and then goes on to talk of shield and buckler, helmet and sword. Why is it that when the Bible speaks of living for God it uses military metaphors? 'Put on,' says Ephesians. 'Put on the whole armor of God (Buttrick 1987:88).

The preacher also uses a rhetorical skill. He arouses curiosity from the audience and makes them remain for the rest of the sermon. A preacher should be aware that the first two sentence of the sermon's introduction should

be simple and clear. The above example is good in that respect. Introductions can develop a single image to work from or, at most, parallel images.

### **5.1.2 Text-images and the sermon's introduction**

The text itself can be the sermon's actual source and the introduction to the sermon. This section investigates the relevance between reflection on the text and the sermon's introduction. What about the role of the Biblical text? Actually, the introduction must not introduce a theme, topic or subject – it must lead us into the text. Therefore, the question follows: how does the text's image, genre, or atmosphere influence the introduction? A good answer to this question can be found in Cilliers (2004), Long (1989), Theissen (1995) and Kooienga (1989). According to Cilliers (2004), there are always certain codes in the text, such as metaphors, symbolism and verbal forms, that must not be disregarded. In preaching, note the role of metaphorical language as a redescription of reality, instead of a mere moralistic ethicalization thereof. In preaching, pay attention to the direction or trajectory of the text; also execute in preaching the objective or intention of the text and be serious about the sociological reading of the biblical text. Develop an imaginative anticipation in preaching as regards the text's application possibilities. In this sense, hopeful preachers are creative, i.e. people who live in the world of the text, but also in the human world.

As Long (1989:11-39) points out, literary forms such as proverb, narrative, psalm, and parable can play a role in the creation of sermons. It is particularly crucial that preachers pay attention to the biblical literary form and dynamics,

because precisely the aspects of biblical texts are often washed out in the typical text-to-sermon process.

The Biblical scholar, John Barton, defines the term “genre” as a conventional pattern, recognizable by certain formal criteria (style, shape, tone, particular syntactic or even grammatical structures, recurring formulaic patterns) that are used in a particular society in social contexts, which are governed by certain formal conventions. The preacher’s task is to reveal how this approach to biblical preaching works in relation to particular biblical genres, such as narrative, prophetic oracle, proverb, psalm, parable, and epistle.

According to Theissen (1995:22-30), Such variation on biblical texts can pick up particularly well the imagery and narrative aspects of biblical texts. In accordance with two basic forms of religious imagery I would distinguish variations of metaphor and symbol, and in accordance with two aspects of narrative texts, variations of role and action.

*Variations of metaphor.* A metaphor is a semantic disruption, i.e. a combination of meanings in the text, which either have at one time deviated from normal expectations or still do so.

*Variations of symbol.* In contrast to a metaphor, a symbol must always also be understood literally. It is misunderstood only where perception is limited to its literal meaning.

*Variations of role.* Images (whether metaphors or symbols) become fruitful in narrative texts where they can be varied. But the basic structures of a narrative

also allow variations. Thus, in any narrative, a series of persons or subjects occurs who usually appear in typical roles as the hero, antagonist, companion, or spectator.

*Variations of action.* These are conceivable not only with real action but also in fictional genres, similes and parables.

*Variations of author and audience.* Every biblical text has an author and an audience. This can easily be seen in the texts of letters, but also in prophetic sayings. Of course, one can vary such authors and audiences.

As Kooienga (1989:51-60) points out, The scripture, both the Old and New Testaments, offer examples of the use of rhetorical principles. Prophets and apostles employed schemes and tropes in their preaching and writing as well as levels of style. The three levels of style, however, appear in Scripture in a unique way. Rather than importing the high style unaltered, with its grand, self-serving manner, the Scriptures adapt this style to a higher purpose. The focus changes from decoration to emotion.

#### **5.1.2.1 *Examples of a sermon's introduction relating to text-images***

Examine the following introduction to a sermon on Matthew 5:4:

What a strange paradox! How flatly it contradicts the accepted views of our day and of every day! Who thinks of congratulating a man because his face is wet with tears? Who thinks of congratulating him because he carries a heavy burden and an aching heart? We pity such. We should no more think of envying a man with tear-blinded eyes than we should think of writing a letter of condolence to some son of good fortune who was managing to get through life without receiving a wound or ever struggling under a heavy load. 'Blessed



are they that mourn,' says Jesus. But we cannot agree, so we mark it out and write: 'Blessed are the tearless.' But our Lord persists in pronouncing a blessing on the mourners (Chappell 1930:22).

Chappell uses a rhetorical question for the sake of emphasis and attention. This method has the advantage of drawing the audience's attention. The preacher's first sentence is enough to capture the audience's attention. He uses a rhetorical skill and combines tear and blessing.

Consider the following introduction to a sermon on John 20:11-18, the story of the encounter between Mary Magdalene and the risen Christ on Easter morning:

The story of the meeting between Mary Magdalene and the risen Christ on the first Easter is a very strange one indeed. Mary is weeping, not only because her Lord is dead, but also because she has found his tomb to be empty. Turning toward one whom she assumed was the gardener, she said through her tears, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I shall take him away.' His reply was but a single word: 'Mary.' In the hearing of her name, she moved from sadness to amazement, from the assumption that she was speaking to a caretaker to the awareness that she was in the presence of the living Lord. But then, just as her tears were giving way to an embrace, Jesus said a disturbing and curious word. As Mary reached out to Jesus, crying, 'Teacher!' Jesus drew back from her. 'Do not hold me,' he said, 'for I have not yet ascended to the Father...'

'Do not hold me.' What an odd statement from the risen Christ. What could he possibly have meant? Throughout the centuries students of the scripture have been puzzled by these words and have offered many suggestions about their meaning. Are any of these suggestions correct? What did Jesus mean? (Long 1989:141-142).

This skill in using a curious question has the advantage of imprinting teaching in the memory. The interrogative question demands the hearer's answer by a

search of his/her own heart. This preacher, through the introduction, is promising a sermon that will explore the history of interpretation of John 20 in quest of an accurate rendering of Jesus' statement, "Do not hold me."

A Korean preacher's introduction to a sermon on Romans 11:25-37 follows:

Some of my fellow believers occasionally ask a seemingly rhetorical question such as, "Pastor, you know everything from the Bible, right?" They then usually stare at me in an envious manner. To such a question I reply, "No, there are so many things which I do not know. The more I acquire knowledge of the Bible, the more questions of the unknown arise." I am then faced with a surprising stare and a dubious gaze. Perhaps the reason why it seems that a pastor is the wisest connoisseur of the Bible is because he/she provides most of their teachings from the parts of the Bible in which he/she has acquired much knowledge and familiarity.

The Bible is a book that God uses to let us know more about Him. That is the reason why the Bible is referred to as a revelation, where the word revelation can be referred to as "the truth that God reveals when the lid is opened." However, we must be very cautious in our thoughts that we are capable of comprehending all that is written in the Bible. There are many truths of the Bible which are not revealed to us even after a few thousand years since its writing. In the book of Romans, which is currently under our examination, as well as some of the letters written by Paul, there are many convoluted aspects which is well beyond our understanding and comprehension (Oak, Han-hum 1999:112).

Oak is skillful in his employment of dialogue in preaching. He uses a good rhetorical expression to make emotional impressions. However, he has no intention of pleasing the audience, but only edifying their Christian life. That the preacher's introduction is personal, life-related and has a questioning sentence, is good. He also leads the audience to the book of Romans.

Consider the following introduction to a sermon on Mark 5:21-43:

In the middle of today's Gospel there is an uncommonly moving scene (Mark 5:25-34). A woman whose life has been bleeding away for twelve years pushes through a tremendous crowd, comes up behind Jesus, touches his garment. Instantly the bleeding ceases; she feels in her body that she has been healed. Jesus is aware that power has gone forth from him; he quickly asks: 'Who touched my garments?' The disciples are amazed, almost amused: 'You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?'

But he keeps looking around, keeps looking until the woman comes in fear and trembling and tells him the whole truth. And Jesus explains to her what has happened: 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace ...'

'Who touched me?' Three years ago, for the first time, that question laid hold of me, made me shiver. I cannot get it out of my mind. Increasingly it has told me something: something about Jesus, something about myself, something about Christ living. A word about each (Long 1989:145).

Long develops his sermons using questions and communicating with his hearers. To do this, he answers questions and objections that his hearers might have. This style has advantages for preaching. Its foremost strength lies in attracting the listeners' attention and causing them to think and reason about the subject at hand. The audience feels sympathy for the sermon's introduction. The preacher also uses a rhetorical skill to arouse their understanding.

### **5.1.3 The preacher-images and the sermon's introduction**

This section, concerning the preacher's impression, demonstrates images of the preacher, which are discussed in Thomas Long's book, *The witness of preaching*. Long (1989:23-47) provides a useful commentary about the image of the preacher – the herald, the pastor, the storyteller and the witness.

The preacher's first image is that of the *herald*, which was the most prevalent metaphor advanced by homiletics of the last generation. This image is biblical, derived from several Greek terms used in the New Testament to describe preaching.

The second image employed to describe the identity of the preacher is that of the *pastor*, who wants something good to happen to, and for, the hearers as a result of the sermon. The pastoral preacher must know people and how they listen to messages.

The third image of the preacher is the *storyteller*. This image differs from the previous two in that it tells us who the preacher is by describing how he/she preaches: by telling stories.

The final image of the preacher is that of a witness. It is important to keep in mind that this image implies that the preacher is the one bearing witness and, in that, it is precisely the court's origin of the witness metaphor that imparts power as an image for the preacher. The important notion of the witness is that he/she has seen something, and is willing to tell the truth about it.

#### **5.1.3.1 Examples of a sermon's introduction relating to preacher-images**

An introduction to a sermon on Psalm 31:15 follows:

I once had a good friend whom I shall never forget. He was a French minister

and professor. At the New Year of 1956, just five years ago now, he preached in a reformed church in North Africa on this text: 'My time is secure in your hands'. It was a very warm, meaty sermon, stirring and alive. When I read it again a day or two ago, I found that it was so good that for a moment I wondered if I should not simply bring it with me and read it to you. It was also this man's last sermon: five day later, when he had returned to Paris, he died quite unexpectedly. How do I know that it is not the last one that you will be allowed to hear? How do any of us know that we shall still be here in a year, or even in five days? 'In the midst of life we are surrounded by death' (Karl Barth 1967:40).

Barth makes use of an everyday experience to illustrate the truth of God so that his hearers may understand and be convinced of it. This introduction may be a good example of a preacher's personal experience. The audience can pay attention to the preacher and the sermon because the preacher's experience may be their own experience.

The following is an introduction to a sermon on Romans 11:33-36:

In the fall of the year, even after the days grow short and the air crisp, I still go out on the patio alone at the close of the day. It usually takes only a few minutes to knit up the raveled sleeve, quietly fold it, and put it away. But those few minutes are necessary; everyone needs a time and a place for such things.

But this particular evening was different. I sat there remembering, trying to understand the painful distance between the day as I planned it and the day as it had been. The growing darkness was seeping into mind and heart and I was as the night. Looking back on it, I know now that it was this evening on which the idea came to me. But frankly I was in no mood to entertain it (Craddock 1971:163).

Craddock is famous for inductive preaching. He tells an ordinary story and leads the audience to the message of the Word. For an illustration of Gospel

truths, he makes great use of metaphors and similes from nature and ordinary experiences of life. He implements these earthly things for spiritual lessons.

Consider the following introduction to a sermon on John 12:32-33:

When I was a child growing up on a farm, one of my favorite toys was a magnet that came out of the magneto of a Model T Ford. Before cars had batteries, the magneto delivered the spark to the motor's cylinders. The way in which that magnet attracted different metals fascinated my small boy's mind.

Today I'm much more interested in persons who attract people than in metals that attract other metals, whether those persons are politicians, entertainers, writers, teachers, or preachers. They are called charismatic persons, and some of them have good character and some don't. What they all have in common is that they draw people.

The text for this sermon gives John's clue to what draws people to Jesus Christ, and it's a bit of a surprise. If the question 'What draws people to Christ?' were asked of most Bible-study groups, the answers would mention different aspects of his life, his teaching, or his ministry. There is a good chance that no one would suggest 'the cross.' Yet John ties the drawing power of Christ directly to the manner of Christ's death (Chafin 1988:3).

The above sermon may be good example of a preacher's life-related story and a personal experience. Chafin is good at gleaning spiritual lessons from ordinary life and sometimes draws illustrations from family life. In short, he is a preacher with a keen spiritual insight, who describes heavenly things by means of earthly things and is a great observer of the works of God in ordinary life. This introduction can arouse the congregation's interest, because they are familiar with that story.

#### **5.1.4 The congregation-images and the sermon's introduction**

An examination of the congregation-image follows. A strong relevance exists between the congregation and the sermon's introduction. The latter is like a contract between the preacher and the congregation. Not only must the introduction be relevant to the sermon's topic, it must also relate to the congregation. This is when the preacher suggests to the congregation what he or she wishes to discuss in the sermon and gains the congregation's willing participation in what is to follow.

Preaching is not only the preacher's task; it is also the task of those who gather to hear what he/she has to say. According to Parker (1992:48), The preacher is only the half of the Church's activity of proclamation. He has received God's message from Holy Scripture and is now handing it on to others. These others, the members of the congregation, form the other half.

Bogart (1967:219) remarks, "For a number of years the term 'audience' has been essential to the vocabulary of media and communications research." Calvin certainly expected the congregation to be active in the business of the church's preaching, for preaching is a corporate action of the whole church (Parker 1992:48).

Furthermore, the sermon often consists of a statement of the congregation's need or needs, especially when it has been prepared to meet this need or condition. This type of sermon is especially valid when the people, who are

eager to have their needs fulfilled, generally recognize the need. The use of “you” offers another advantage to speakers of English that should not be overlooked. Since “you” can be either singular or plural, it can refer, simultaneously, to the whole audience and its individual members. So, the listeners apply it to themselves.

With reference to the congregation-image: what is the role of the congregation in the sermon? An appropriate answer can be found in Cilliers (2004) and McClure (1995).

According to Cilliers (2004), The congregation’s voice must definitely be heard in the process of preparing a sermon. After all, preaching is directed at the congregation, but it also originates from the congregation. Therefore, the preacher needs the congregation’s many eyes, his/her privileges as exegetist and proclaimer must be expanded to include the congregation. The process of preparing a sermon must be co-determined principally by the congregation. Preaching is truly a congregational and thus contextual issue.

As McClure (1995:48-58) points out, the preacher and hearer work together to establish and interpret the topics for preaching. They also decide together what the practical results of those interpretations might be for the congregation. Then, the preacher enters the pulpit and re-presents this collaborative process in the event of sermon delivery. Collaborative preaching promises to overcome the problems we have associated with sovereign and inductive forms of preaching, and to support a mutual and empowering form of congregational



leadership.

#### **5.1.4.1 *Examples of an introduction to a sermon relating to the congregation-images***

The following is an introduction to a sermon on Acts 10:1-35:

I want to let someone else to speak today. Someone is who can tell the story of Cornelius the centurion in quite a different way. He is not exactly well known, since he appears in only three verses in the New Testament: Simon the Tanner. At first he had doubts about speaking to us today, because he is just a simple man from Palestine, but I thought it would be a good thing for him to do so. For earliest Christianity was a movement of simple, insignificant people, and it is in keeping with Christian faith to take the perspective of the insignificant, the outsiders, and those who come off worst. So I shall step down and allow Simon the Tanner to speak (Gemunden, quoting Theissen 1995:131).

Gemunden's opening sentence is most astounding. this preacher also uses rhetorical skills to capture the audience's attention. It is clear that he never demeans the use of rhetoric in preaching as long as it serves preaching God's Word. It is lawful, and even profitable. In the sermon's introduction, he uses a unique rhetorical skill.

Consider the following introduction to a sermon on 1 Corinthians 11:17-32:

Some years ago, there was a movie about a family reunion. The family was a contentious bunch. They scrapped and split and never got along. Yet, every year, they scheduled a party, a family reunion. At a long table, they'd all sit down together. But, you couldn't help noticing the sidelong glances. The cold shoulders, the obvious slurs. Perhaps that's the way it was in Corinth. Though they gathered at one table and shared one cup together, they were at odds.

Corinth was a divided church (Long 1989:147).

Long compares Corinth to a family reunion and practises the plain style of preaching successfully. It is his strong conviction that the Gospel message must be plain to the mind and emotions. He uses Christ's example as his principle for plain speaking. This introduction manages both to anticipate the theme of the rest of the sermon (conflict in the church), and to lead the hearers fluently into the next step of the sermon, a discussion of the Lord's Supper. The preacher begins with imaginary situations, announces his theme, and connects this with his text, which he then proceeds to explain.

Consider the following introduction to a sermon on Matthew 12:30:

Suppose that on last election day an officer had visited the home of an American citizen and said, 'You did not vote today. You are summoned to court to defend yourself against the charge of contributing to the destruction of democracy.' Or suppose someone should go on Sunday morning to an American father who, comfortable in bathrobe and bedroom slippers, is reading the newspaper and say to him, 'Why have you chosen to help destroy religion and the church?'

Suppose, again, that we should go to someone perfectly able to make a gift to the community chest, who instead joins the majority of citizens and does nothing about it, or to someone who is perfectly able to act as a solicitor of such gifts and does not, say, 'What do you have against the little children who are helped by clinics and hospitals?' or 'Why are you aiding the cause of juvenile delinquency?' Every such imaginary individual would be amazed forgetting for a moment that he should be greatly angered. Yet in each case the charge is a just one. We have talked a great deal about subversive activity. What about subversive inactivity?

Surely, this is what Jesus meant when he said, 'He that is not with me is against me.' Was he not in other words saying, 'In the business of faith and righteousness there is no such thing as neutrality. You are either for or against, and hesitation between the two means that you are against.'

I should like to apply this principle of Jesus in two realms – democracy and the Christian cause (Jones 1958:158-159).

Jones, the preacher, wants to lead his audience with a story about an event. A good point in an introduction to a sermon can be a daily event. He is especially imaginative in his use of common experiences and nature to describe the spiritual graces of heaven. He explains divine truths by means of common and familiar experiences in a vivid way that strongly impresses his listeners in order to help them clearly understand these truths.

Consider the following introduction to a sermon:

The church ought to go to hell. That's right, you heard me – to hell. The church ought to go to the hell of the inner city, where crime makes decent life impossible. The church ought to go to the hell of strife-torn areas of our world, where orphans cry out at night in memory of their parents. The church ought to go to the hell of destitute places, where people are subsisting on a handful of rice a day. (Killinger 1985:87).

Killinger, the preacher, once began a sermon on the mission of the church by declaring: sometimes a preacher will wish to command attention for a sermon by introducing it with remarks designed to provoke a shocked reaction.

In addition, we can also find wonderful introductions from the Bible, e.g. Acts 2:14-21, 3:21, 4:8-9, 10:34-35, 13:16-23, 17:22-23, 22:1-5 and 26:1-3. Thus far, we have provided good examples for a sermon's introduction relating to four images. The common feature of these examples is enough to capture the hearers' attention so that they keenly await the rest of the sermon.

The following section will discuss bad examples of an introduction to a sermon.

## **5.2 BAD EXAMPLES OF AN INTRODUCTION TO A SERMON**

The previous section investigated good examples of a sermon's introduction relating to four images. Now, this section will discuss some bad examples of an introduction to a sermon.

### **5.2.1 Step-down introduction**

Imagine hearing an introduction such as the following:

We have all heard of the apostle Paul, a brave champion of faith. After his astonishing conversion, he journeyed around the ancient world preaching the gospel. More than any other apostle, Paul spread good news on the earth. Well, one of the cities Paul visited was Corinth.

Corinth was a brawling seaport filled with sleazy bars, brothels, and noisy bazaars, a difficult town in which to build a church. One of the problems which Paul encountered in Corinth had to do with the Lord's Supper. Wealthy folk came with baskets full of food while the poor, slaves, and outcasts went hungry....

The congregation will become irritated because at the outset they figured their preacher was going to preach on Paul. Then, abruptly, the preacher switched focus to the city of Corinth, only to shift to the Lord's Supper – a third subject matter. The congregation will be irritated. ... As a result, they do not focus consciousness; they fan irritation (Buttrick 1987:92-93).

The preacher apparently plans to speak on 1 Corinthians 11, a passage about the Lord's Supper in Corinth. However, the preacher arrives at the focus by first speaking of Paul and then describing Corinth before, finally, getting round to a discussion of the Eucharist in the Corinthian church. The congregation will

become irritated because, at the outset, they thought their preacher would preach about Paul. Then, suddenly, the preacher switches the focus to the city of Corinth, only again to shift to the Lord's Supper – a third matter. This will irritate the congregation.

### **5.2.2 The tangential introduction**

Suppose you were to hear a preacher begin a sermon with the following words:

Every year in Boston there's a race: The Boston Marathon. People line up, five thousand or more, and run through the city's streets. Every year, the Boston papers carry pictures of previous winners. Have you ever run a distance race? I have, and they are grueling. Well, take a look at the Bible. There's a race in the Bible. 'Seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witness ...' (Buttrick 1987:93).

Note that the preacher has started to focus you on the image of a marathon race in order to set up a parallel to the marathon described in Hebrews, chapter 12. However, the seemingly innocent interruption, "Have you ever run a distance race?" breaks the focus and requires a point-of-view adjustment. Unfortunately, no matter how well meant, this disrupts the focus and is apt to leave a congregation floundering. Tangential intrusions, although brief, cannot be tolerated.

### **5.2.3 Introductions with an oblique suspense**

Imagine a sermon that starts with the following words:

Right in the middle of a family argument, it happened. As they threw words back and forth like stones, name-calling and cutting remarks, it happened. Call it a miracle if you will, but suddenly it happened ...(Buttrick 1987:94).

The audience does not know what “it” is, or who “they” are, or where the action is happening. Preachers who employ this device suppose that it will command attention because a congregation, driven slightly nuts by not knowing, will want to know. ... The real problem with oblique suspense is that they prevent the one thing an introduction intends to do, i.e. to focus consciousness.

#### **5.2.4 Proceeding introduction**

Imagine the following introduction to a sermon on Ephesians 6:1-4:

Today, I shall share the Word with you. The title is God’s new family’. For several weeks, we have heard about God’s new family and society. The content of chapter one to three is about the story of salvation of a Christian and the content of chapter four to six is about the principle of a Christian’s life. The message for today is ‘new society of God.’

The main problem of this sermon’s introduction is that it does not arouse the hearers’ interest. The first sentence is conventional and stereotyped. There is no content that can draw the hearers’ attention. This sermon seems to jump straight to the body of the sermon. In other words, it does not give the impression of being a sermon’s introduction.

Imagine the following introduction to a sermon on Job 35:10-11:

As we all know, Job was a happy person. He had lived a successful life and seemed to have no need. But, one day, a dreadful disaster came to his family. Everything that he had was gone and he has only his meagre body left. His

three friends came to him to discuss the reason why he encountered the tragedy. But he could not find the answer.

This sermon's introduction also follows the same pattern that wants to plunge into the topic and seems to be apart from the body of the sermon. Another resource is needed to connect the sermon's introduction in order to explain the sermon's main story.

#### **5.2.5 Proud introduction**

Imagine also the following introduction to a sermon on the end of the world (Mt 24:3-14):

The message for today is about eschatology. I spent two months on this sermon because it is so important. Through this sermon, you will hear about the exact notion of eschatology. After this sermon, you will never be confused about the theory of eschatology.

The theory of eschatology is complicated. The preacher is not Christ, but a servant of Christ, and should not preach as if he were God. Occasionally, the preacher can possibly proclaim a very difficult topic, such as abortion, premarital sex, brain death and divorce. At no time, should the preacher make a promise.

Thus far, we have analyzed several bad examples of introductions to sermons. The conclusion to be drawn from this section is that the preacher should pay attention to his sermon's introduction. All preachers are aware that they should not make mistakes. According to Sangster (1949:127), It was probably the

worst opening of a sermon in all history: I feel I have a feeling which I feel you feel as well.

### **5.3 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

The aim of this chapter has been to emphasize four key aspects of images relating to a sermon's introduction: the God image, text image, the preacher's image and the congregation's image. As examined thus far, we can deduce what are good and bad aspects of an introduction to a sermon. Firstly, good examples of the sermon's introduction are such that they are good enough to capture the hearers' attention so that they then want to hear the rest of the sermon. Secondly, bad examples of introductions to sermons are ones that cause the hearers not to focus on the Word of God because these sermon's introductions are complex and tangential.

The final chapter will make further suggestions.



## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **FURTHER SUGGESTIONS**

The previous chapter discussed good examples of a sermon's introduction, relating to four images: the God images, text images, the preacher's images and the congregation's images, and we also provided bad examples of introductions to sermons.

This final chapter will suggest some further ideas – firstly, by examining the length of the sermon's introduction. Secondly, the time to prepare the sermon's introduction will be studied. Thereafter, the reason why a preacher should not read the sermon's introduction will be discussed. Finally, some check lists for the sermon's introduction will be provided.

#### **6.1 THE LENGTH OF THE SERMON'S INTRODUCTION**

This section investigates the length of a sermon's introduction. As mentioned before (2.1), an introduction to a sermon has significance out of proportion to its length. Firstly, the difference in length will be explained. Then, the length in general will also be discussed.

##### **6.1.1 The difference in length**

There is no fixed rule as regards the length of a sermon's introduction, which depends on several factors – here, there is no standard rule. The preacher's

controlling purpose, the type of sermon, the length of the entire worship service, the time allotted to the sermon, and the congregation's attention span – are all factors that determine the length of the introduction. Cox (1985:168-9) remarks, "Fosdick's introduction varied in length according to his theme and purpose. George Buttrick, on the other hand, wrote short introductions of uniform length; one-half page was the pattern to which he consistently adhered."

In other words, the more complicated the sermon or text, the longer the introduction. If the text is straightforward or familiar to the audience, less time will be needed. However, the first sermon in a series will require a slightly longer introduction because a few sentences should be devoted to introducing the series.

The length varies according to the subject, the audience's level of understanding and the occasion, but a rambling introduction should be carefully avoided. According to Fisher (1979:147), The length of the introduction to a sermon is determined by the subject to be dealt with. ... The introduction to most sermons should be brief. It should introduce what the preacher intends to say.

### **6.1.2 Generality of the length of the introduction**

This section will establish the generality of the length relating to two aspects: a general rule determining the length of the sermon's introduction and its length in general. Practically speaking, it should not be long. Of course, the theme will

determine its length. For the sermon's introduction, an important rule is that the sermon does not exist for the introduction.

#### **6.1.2.1 *General rule for the length of the introduction***

As was already mentioned before (4.2.1), an introduction must be long enough to capture attention, raise needs, and orient the audience to the subject, the idea, or the first point. Until that has been done, the introduction will be incomplete; but anything after that will make the introduction too long. According to Craddock (1971:158), He who preaches inductively will need to be prepared for frequent comments from the congregation to the effect that his sermons seem to be long introductions with a point stated or implied at the end.

It has been said that whether an introduction should be long or short depends upon how well you know the members of your audience and how greatly interested they are in your topic. In a sense, a long, rambling introduction defeats its purpose and consumes valuable time needed for the body of the speech. However, a short introduction may fail to make the audience receptive to what follows.

#### **6.1.2.2 *The length, in general***

It is not easy to determine a general length. However, we can quote various remarks by various scholars. Baumann (1972:137) observes, "According to Henry Grady Davis, it should be one or two minutes in length. Whitesell and

Perry say 5 to 15 percent of the speaking time.”

An introduction lasting five minutes is long enough for a 40-minute sermon (Evans 1964:72). Buttrick (1987:86) indicates, “So, as a general guideline, introductions may run between seven and twelve sentences in length.” According to Killinger (1985:81-82), George Buttrick disciplined us in his sermon classes by requiring that we write our introductions in fifty words or less. His own introductions are seldom that brief, but neither are they very length. Normally they run between one hundred and one hundred and fifty words.

The introduction should be one-tenth to one-fifth of the sermon. This depends on the nature of the subject matter (Cannon 2003:103). Gibbs (1960:195) states, “Five minutes, or less, should be ample for a forty minute address.” Reu (1967:489) declares, “An introduction should not exceed one eighth of the entire discourse.” According to Hoefler (1982:51), It is dangerous to establish a rule for such things, but an approximation would be that a fifteen-seventeen minute sermon, the introduction should not exceed one minute. Since the average person speaks about 120 words a minute, a maximum introduction should consist of no more than 120 words.

Perry (1965:77) also pronounces, “The time used by the introduction should occupy no more than fifteen percent of the speaking time.” According to Hostetler (1986:13), As a rule of thumb, however, the introduction should be about twenty percent of the total sermon. That works out to five minutes for a

twenty-five minute message. As an homiletical student, I also feel that nowadays the introduction should be approximately about 10 percent of the length of the entire sermon.

The conclusion we may draw from this section is that the length will vary depending on the sermon itself. An introduction should be long enough to accomplish its purpose, and short enough so that it does not dissipate the hearer's sense of expectancy (Gerlach & Balge 1978:81).

But, in these days when everybody works on schedules, and under pressure, one hears so many competing voices, reads picture magazines quickly, and listens to brief programs over radio and television, one cannot expect an audience to be interested in a sermon unless the preacher knows how to say what he/she has to say quickly, briefly, and to the point. Whatever else is said pro and con introductions, all seem to agree that they should be brief. Of course, the preacher will want to proportion it to the length of the message, but in general it should be brief.

The next section will discuss the time for preparing the sermon's introduction.

## **6.2 TIME TO PREPARE THE SERMON'S INTRODUCTION**

The previous section examined the length of the sermon's introduction. This section investigates the time to prepare the sermon's introduction. The question now arises whether to write the sermon's introduction out. Since God has made us all differently, and has given us distinct personalities and talents,

there can be no fixed rule for all. In this phase, there are two theories on this aspect: prepare it first, or prepare it last.

### **6.2.1 Prepare the introduction first**

Some preachers insist that the preacher should prepare the introduction to the sermon first. Jones (1958:161) enlightens, “Blackwood says the introduction should be the last part of the sermon prepared. But he is almost alone in taking that position. Most writers contend it ought to be the first section of the sermon composed.” The introduction should be composed before the body of the discourse. This is the natural order, and the finished introduction will assist the preacher in composing the remainder somewhat, as this will help the hearers (Broadus 1944:108).

According to Dabney (1979:152-153), I would recommend that it be done after the matter of the sermon has been selected and digested in the mind, but before the body of the discourse is actually written. The former part of this rule is necessary to secure in the introduction appropriateness of matter, the latter to secure harmony and movement in the composition of the whole.

### **6.2.2 Prepare the introduction last**

In order to avoid anticipating the sermon proper, it is advisable to write the introduction last. If not last, then, at least not until the preacher has thought through the body of the sermon. As a general rule, the development of an

introduction comes toward the end of message preparation. In that way the message is pretty much in place and the introduction can have the highest level of relationship to the central focus of the exposition.

Cox (1985:165) observes, "We might prepare the introduction last, assuming the logic of having something to introduce before introductions are made." Stott (1982:243-244) agrees, "It seems essential to prepare the body of the sermon itself. Only then shall we 'top and tail' the body, that is, supply it with a head and a tail, an introduction and a conclusion."

An introduction can be designed only after a full sermon scenario has been partially worked out. Some introductions should be written before the body of the sermon has been determined, and some – perhaps most – after. The introduction might be the last part of the sermon that the preacher prepares. Cannon (2003:104) recommends, "In fact, it might be a wise principle to write introduction last always." Demaray (1978:77) observes, "Andrew W. Blackwood counts himself among those who prefer to compose the introduction after the sermon is written."

Practically speaking, sermon's introductions take time to prepare and are usually thought out last in the process of sermon construction, like an introduction to a book. Stated differently, the last section of the sermon to be prepared is the introduction. In actual practice the introduction, like the title, is usually one of the last parts of the sermon to be prepared.

If the introduction occurs to you before you have formulated the theme and parts, it probably will contain the theme and parts. Then, it is no longer an introduction, but a rough summary of your sermon (Gerlach & Balge 1978:79). According to Fasol (1989:64), Many preachers prefer to prepare the introduction after the title, body, conclusion, and invitation have been completed. Actually, it makes a lot of sense to prepare the introduction last. Only after a given sermon's body and concluding statements are clarified in the preacher's own mind can he or she really know what is being introduced and how to go about it.

Introductions cannot develop until a basin structure has been determined (Buttrick 1987:309). Phelps (1908:279) recommends, "Therefore do not compose the introduction till the plan of the whole discourse is outlined." According to Gilman, Aly & Reid (1951:68), Since the usefulness of the introduction depends upon an understanding of the entire discourse, you should construct it after you have prepared the rest of your speech.

The conclusion that may be drawn from this section is that there is a difference of opinion concerning when the introduction of the sermon should be prepared. My final comment is: I suppose each preacher has his/her own preference. leave the introduction to be done near the end of my preparation (Vines 1985:137).

### **6.3 DO NOT MERELY READ THE SERMON'S INTRODUCTION**



The previous section examined the time to prepare the sermon's introduction. This section will investigate the reason why the preacher should not read the sermon's introduction.

Eye contact is extremely important. The first words should be memorized and be given while looking at the congregation, not at the notes, and with just the right effect. Listeners want the preacher to look them in the eye. Robinson (1980:166) warns, "He should look at the people, not at his notes or even at his Bible." Stevenson and Diehl (1958:109) also recommend, "To speak effectively to people we must look them in the eye. This means not simply staring at them, but seeing them so as to receive the visual messages which they send us." According to Stevenson and Diehl (1958:109), As for the breaking of eye contact to stare at the ceiling or the floor or the wall, there is no excuse except habit – a bad habit. To speak with people effectively we must look them in the eye.

Therefore, the preacher should commit to memory the main thoughts of the introduction or even memorize the entire introduction to ensure that what the preacher says will not be trite or irrelevant. Bartow (1980:100) states, "The preaching moment is as much your listeners' moment as your own. Therefore, establish direct contact with those listeners – see faces – note postures – catch eyes."

The conclusion to be drawn from this section is that the preacher should look at the congregation during the sermon's introduction, and that the hearers also

want the preacher to make eye contact with them.

The following section provides check lists for the sermon's introduction.

#### **6.4 CHECK LISTS FOR THE SERMON'S INTRODUCTION**

Here are some check lists for the sermon's introduction. For the preacher, they are useful to make sure his position of the sermon's introduction.

On check lists, Mayhue (1992:245-246) remarks as follows:

Use these factors to evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of your introduction: Does it fit the occasion?; Does it connect with the subject of your message?; Do you deliver in the message what you promise in the introduction?; Is it short, like an appetizer in relation to the main course?; Do you avoid using humor just for humor's sake?; Do you create the highest possible level of interest to capture the audience's attention?; Is the introduction crisp and striking?

Gerlach and Balge (1978:87) describe their views on check lists as follows:

Check questions for introductions: Does the opening thought relate to the life of the hearer, specifically, personally?; Does the introduction lead directly to the main thought of the sermon?; Does the introduction point up the connection between the text and the theme?; Does the introduction begin with material related to the Bible, or with material related to the area of life to which the Bible speaks?

Adrian Rogers has a useful formula for putting together a sermon's introduction: Hey! You! Look! Do!

*Hey*, get the attention of the listeners in the introduction.

*You*; indicate that the subject matter at hand applies to the listeners.

*Look*; give some information about the subject to come.

*Do*; tell them what they are expected to do as result of hearing the sermon.

This is a very helpful formula in building an effective introduction (Vines (1985:141)).

Check-list questions regarding the sermon's introduction:

Do my opening thoughts relate to the personal lives of my hearers? Does this introduction lead into the central theme or big truth? Does this introduction indicate the connection between the biblical text and the big truth? Does this introduction enable me personally to get off to a comfortable start? (Erdahl 1976:90).

Four principles are basic in the planning of the introduction:

(1) It should put the speaker on common ground with the audience. (2) It should relate the topic to the audience. (3) It should associate the topic with the occasion. (4) It should adjust the speech to the immediate situation (Gilman, Aly & Reid 1951:69).

## **6.5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

Thus far, we have analyzed some suggestions for the sermon's introduction. This chapter's purpose has been to emphasize four major aspects of suggestions for the sermon's introduction: First, its length depends on the nature of the subject. However, it should be 10% of the length of the whole sermon. Second, the time in preparation of the sermon's introduction depends on each preacher's own preference, but the major tendency is to compose it last. Third, eye contact with the hearers during the sermon's introduction means that the

preacher should look at the congregation to obtain the desired results. Last, check lists for the sermon's introduction can assist the preacher.

As mentioned before (1.4), my hypothesis consisted of two points: the sermon's introduction has the significant role to determine whether or not the hearers intentionally decide to listen to the rest of the sermon. The quality of the introduction affects the preachers' ability to proclaim the rest of the sermon.

In this phase, I wish to describe my opinion concerning the purpose of an introduction to a sermon. As briefly mentioned before (1.2), there are two different theories about the purpose of a sermon's introduction: gaining the attention and not losing the attention. My opinion is that the purpose of an introduction to a sermon is to gain the attention of those who are not ready to hear the sermon and also not to lose the attention of those who are ready to listen to the sermon.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

### **1. GENERAL SUMMARY**

The main aim of this study was to establish an effective introduction to a sermon in contemporary preaching, and to arouse the necessity and importance of the sermon's introduction.

In chapter 2, in order firstly to prepare to describe the reality of the sermon's introduction, we demonstrated an appropriate analysis of the identity of a sermon's introduction that comprises the following four components: the definition of an introduction to a sermon; the relevant rhetoric in a sermon's introduction; Karl Barth's theory of the uselessness of a sermon's introduction; and the theory of the necessity for a sermon's introduction.

Chapter 3 explained the importance and purposes of a sermon's introduction. We revealed two aspects of the importance of an introduction to a sermon: the sermon's introduction affects the preacher in proclaiming efficiently and the sermon's introduction affects the hearers in effectively receiving the rest of the sermon.

We also demonstrated three aspects of the purposes of the sermon's introduction: it is to gain the congregation's attention, not to lose their attention and to introduce the theme.

Chapter 4 examined sources and qualities of the sermon's introduction. In the light of the sources, the following two main strategic suggestions were made. The first source was from the text itself. The second was from the various contexts. Here, we firstly examined the text as the source, the background of the text, information about the writer of the text, details of the word or phrase of the text, and the construction of the text.

After discussing the sources of the text, we examined the source of the context: the life-related story, rhetorical question, church year, current event, humour, and an explanation of the topic.

Chapter 5 provided good examples of a sermon's introduction relating to four images, as well as some bad examples. In respect of images, the following four were revealed: first, a God-image implies that the preacher should let the hearers see a God-image in the first part of the sermon. The particular related questions to be examined are: how can we provide a God-image in the sermon's introduction? What roles do God-images play in respect of the sermon's introduction? Second, text-images mean that we must explore the relevance between manifestation of the text and the sermon's introduction. What about the character of the Biblical text? Actually, the introduction is not intended to introduce a theme, topic or subject – it must lead us to the text. Therefore, the question must be asked: how does the text's image, genre or atmosphere influence the introduction? Third, the preacher-images mean that, during this pace concerned with the impression of the preacher, we explained four images of the preacher – the herald, the pastor, the storyteller and the

witness. Lastly, the congregation–images imply that preaching is not only the preacher’s task; it is also the task of those who gather to hear what the preacher has to say. Furthermore, the sermon often will consist of a statement of the need or needs of the congregation especially when the sermon has been prepared to meet this need or condition. As regards the congregation’s image, what is the role of the congregation in the sermon?

Chapter 6 attempts to appropriately illustrate suggestions to further the sermon’s introduction, comprising the following four components: the length of the sermon’s introduction, the time in preparing the sermon’s introduction, the reason why the preacher should not read the sermon’s introduction, and check lists for the sermon’s introduction.

## **2. CONCLUSION**

This study has dealt with an effective introduction to a sermon in contemporary preaching. The preaching ministry is demanding work. Rexroat (1992:171) declares, “Preaching is the presentation of the living Word (Jesus Christ) as revealed in the written Word (Scripture) by the spoken Word (the sermon).”

There are three kinds of preachers: the ones to whom you *cannot* listen, the ones to whom you *can* listen, and the ones to whom you *must* listen. This implies that, as preachers, our task is to make Jesus live in the minds and hearts of men (Luccock 1928:23). The artists of this world seek an earthly crown – the honour of others or of their own hearts, but we have been called to

be the oracles of God. In a sense, a sermon is a living event that happens when a preacher preaches. Eslinger (1996:1) declares, "After all, faith comes from hearing." In other words, the preacher's role is to stand behind and under the Bible, letting it deliver its own message through him/her, and putting him-/herself explicitly and transparently under the authority of that message, so that his/her very style of relaying it models response to it. According to Stewart (1946:174), Every sermon must have something of the preacher's own life-blood in it.

It has been said that preaching is the first and final expression of theology (Lischer 1981:20). According to Farmer (1953:56-57), If what has been said is sound, namely that speech is absolutely central and indispensable in the world of personal relationships, then we can begin to understand from a new angle why preaching is so central and indispensable in God's saving work among men.

Cilliers (2004:20) states, "I believe that preaching is one of the most crucial events that can take place in our world and time." The preacher's word is the Word of God in the form of the word of the contemporary church (Hill 1983:114). Therefore, every preacher should prepare an introduction as if everything depends on that first impression. The preparation of an arresting introduction may take time – but it will be time well spent. My final comment is that, in many ways, the introduction is the most important part of sermon delivery (Hostetler 1986:11).



Consequently, we hope that this study, about the effective introduction to a sermon in contemporary preaching, will emphasize the importance of the sermon's introduction and encourage other subsequent studies to elaborate further on the practical reality of contemporary preaching.

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